

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

Permanent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/130193>

Copyright and reuse:

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it.

Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

THE BRITISH LIBRARY

BRITISH THESIS SERVICE

TITLE SHAKESPEARE'S RECEPTION IN 18TH CENTURY
ITALY: THE CASE OF HAMLET

AUTHOR Gabriella
PETRONE FRESCO

DEGREE Ph.D

**AWARDING
BODY** Warwick University

DATE 1991

**THESIS
NUMBER** DX177597

THIS THESIS HAS BEEN MICROFILMED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction. Some pages may have indistinct print, especially if the original papers were poorly produced or if awarding body sent an inferior copy. If pages are missing, please contact the awarding body which granted the degree.

Previously copyrighted materials (journals articles, published texts etc.) are not filmed.

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and that no information derived from it may be published without the author's prior written consent.

Reproduction of this thesis, other than as permitted under the United Kingdom Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under specific agreement with the copyright holder, is prohibited.

**SHAKESPEARE'S RECEPTION IN 18TH CENTURY ITALY:
THE CASE OF HAMLET**

BY

Gabriella Petrone Fresco

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of the
Degree of PhD in Comparative Literature

University of Warwick
Graduate School of Comparative Literary Theory
and Literary Translation

August 1991

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1 - 3
PART I	
SHAKESPEARE AND ITALIAN LITERATURE IN THE 18TH CENTURY	
The Italian 18th Century Cultural Background	4 - 20
The Theatre Question	21 - 36
The Era of Translations	37 - 46
Milestones in the history of Shakespeare's Reception in 18th Century Italy in the Context of "Anglomania"	47 - 63
PART II	
ANTONIO CONTI, PAOLO ROLLI, VOLTAIRE, GUISEPPE BARETTI: THEIR RESPECTIVE ROLES IN SHAKESPEARE'S RECEPTION IN 18TH CENTURY ITALY WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO HAMLET	
Conti and Rolli	64 - 70
Voltaire	71 - 89
Baretti	90 - 103
PART III	
FRENCH & ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE THE FIRST ITALIAN <u>AMLETO</u>	
Dominico Valentini and Giustina Renier-Michiel	104 - 108
La Place - Ducis - Letourneur	109 - 118
Alessandro Verri's Unpublished Translation of <u>Hamlet</u>	119 - 159
Stage History of Ducis' Italian Translation of <u>Hamlet</u> by F. Gritti	160 - 169
CONCLUSION	170 - 175
Appendix I	
Saxo's Tale of Amlethus and its derivations in Apostolo Zeno's <u>Ambleto</u> and Shakespeare's <u>Hamlet</u> - A Comparison of the Treatment of their Common Source - Tables I, II, III, IV	176 - 189
Appendix II	
Unpublished Translation of the "To Be or not To Be" Monologue by G. Renier-Michiel	190

Appendix III	
The Verri Brothers' "Carteggio" on the Subject of <u>Hamlet</u> and of Shakespeare in General	191 - 199
Appendix IV	
The Verri Family Circle	200 - 202
BIBLIOGRAPHY	i - xi

INTRODUCTION

The history of Shakespeare's reception in 18th century Italy is a very scanty and fragmentary one. The aim of the present study is to attempt to join the scattered fragments of this mosaic together in a historic perspective stretching through the whole century and to try and interpret the resulting picture in the light of contemporary theories of comparative literature.

Most of the emphasis will be placed on the role of the very few Italian worshippers of Shakespeare (Conti, Rolli, Baretti, Valentini, Verri) who were able to have a first-hand knowledge of his works. They can be seen as isolated receivers of a literary communication which was at the same time quite in advance in respect of average popular taste, and strongly antithetic to received Italian ideas of the period, dominated as they were by the dictatorship of French classicism. This means that not only the single receivers, with their different personalities, sensibilities and outlooks will be examined, but that also the objective conditions in which they found themselves, as well as the possibilities of reception afforded by the society in which they lived (particularly with regard to the transgression of the Aristotelian dramatic rules) will be considered.

As a result, the link between literature and society in the specific situation of 18th century Italy will be made clearer and the relationship between these isolated receivers and their literary object (i.e. Shakespeare's works) will be better explained by enlarging the scope of the study from the history of Shakespeare's reception to a wider perspective of aesthetics of reception. A symbolic example of the general ignorance about Shakespeare in 18th century Italy is Ambleto, a "dramma per musica" written in 1705 by Apostolo Zeno, based on the same source as Hamlet. The author, one of the most committed intellectuals of the age, did not know anything about Hamlet and manipulated the same material Shakespeare had used in the way which would be most likely to be successful.

From a comparative point of view Hamlet and Ambleto belong to a heterogeneous series of literary works being part of different literary systems, and being written in different historical periods. What they can be said to have in common, apart from having made use of the same source, is the fact that they were written in the most popular theatrical genre of their time in their respective countries: tragedy in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, "dramma per musica" in 18th century Italy. Lively, light-hearted, fluffy stories accompanied by beautiful music and obligatorily concluding with a happy ending were what the 18th century Italian audience wanted and expected. Dark, tormented stories with a tragic ending, even if freely mixed with comic scenes, was what Shakespeare's audience were usually given. Such a difference in the expectations and predilections of English and Italian audiences respectively may well have contributed to the reasons why the process of introducing Shakespeare into the Italian literary system met with so many difficulties and was so belated in time.

From the viewpoint of the literary systems, the relationship between the source system, the English, and the target system, the Italian, (apart from very few cases) was wholly dependent on the intermediation of a third system, the French. This intermediation worked in two ways: one was the influence of Voltaire's ambiguous love-hate relationship with Shakespeare and the other, as the only available instrument for the knowledge of Shakespeare in Italy, the French translations of his works. A third channel might possibly be considered: the Italian translations of the French "comédies larmoyantes", incorporating elements which, although deformed, reflected a Shakespearian influence.

An attempt will therefore be made to trace the intricate relationship linking the Shakespeare enthusiasts to Voltaire and French culture in general, along with the impact of French translations on Italian culture.

Hamlet has been chosen as an exemplary case in Shakespearian production because it is associated with the first important milestones in the history of Shakespeare's reception in Italy. Moreover, Hamlet exemplifies Italy's cultural indebtedness towards France in the field of Shakespearian translation (the first

Shakespearian play staged in Italy being a Hamlet translated from a French adaptation), as well as the need for Northern European literary works in general to be profoundly modified in order to be assimilated and later be reproduced creatively.

On the other hand, Hamlet is a particularly unfortunate case of a missed opportunity: the first complete translation into Italian by Alessandro Verri was never published nor staged, causing a further delay in the knowledge of Shakespeare in 18th century Italy. Verri will be given particular attention in this study: owing to the multiple roles he played in relation to Shakespeare, he can be seen as summing up the three different categories of readers defined by H.R. Jauss as follows: "le lecteur qui lit, le critique qui réfléchit et l'écrivain lui-même incité à écrire à son tour"¹ In fact, besides being one of the very few Italian readers of the original text of Hamlet, he also meditated critically on it, as will be seen from his correspondence with his brother and from the comments added to the first version of his translation. Moreover, he transferred settings, specific terms, feelings, from Shakespeare into his own creative work, a typical example of creative reception through which new elements from a foreign culture made their way into Italian literature and finally contributed in an obscure, tortuous way to the birth of the Romantic movement in Italy.

¹ Cfr. H.R. Jauss, Pour une esthétique de la réception. Gallimard, Paris, 1978, p.48.

PART I

SHAKESPEARE AND ITALIAN LITERATURE IN THE 18TH CENTURY

The Italian 18th Century Cultural Background

The extent of the ignorance about Shakespeare at the beginning of the 18th century in Italy can be seen from the fact that a musical drama called Ambleto could be written in 1705 by such a cultivated Venetian writer as Apostolo Zeno, with no reference whatsoever to Shakespeare's Hamlet, because he simply did not know about it.¹ When Zeno in 18th century Venice read the old legend in Saxo Grammaticus' Historica Danica, he was so struck by that brilliant, exciting tale that he thought it might provide a less commonplace subject for a libretto than the usual ones and he transformed the ancient Scandinavian legend according to the standards of "dramma per musica", or, as it is called in Italy today melodrama², the only really popular form of theatre production (with Commedia dell'Arte) in 18th century Italy. The birth of "dramma per musica" in Italy has been considered an almost inevitable phenomenon, involving, as it were, a sort of symbiotic relationship with the Italian language.³ Tragedy, on the other hand, although enjoying the highest reputation as a form of art, has always seemed to be physiologically in opposition both to the nature of the language and to the emotional needs of the Italian audience.⁴

¹ Cfr. A Manzi, "L'istoria d'Ambleto sulle scene Italiane - L'Ambleto italiano", La Rassegna Nazionale. Vol. CLXVIII, Milano, 1.7.1909, p.150: "Ambleto sulle scene italiane è apparso senza la tutela della Shakespeare. (...) Ambleto, anzi Ambleto, sul nostro teatro è arrivato direttamente dalla leggenda danese, senza alcuna sopravveste filosofica e nella schiettezza della tradizione, ricca di elementi teatrali." For a detailed account of this Italian Hamlet and a comparative study of the treatment of the same Scandinavian source by Zeno and Shakespeare, see Appendix I.

² It should be noted that the accepted meaning of the word "melodramma" in Italy has always been closely linked with the opera tradition, whereas in the French-Anglo-German areas of 18th and 19th century culture the term was associated with the adjacent aesthetical concept of the sublime, and characterized Gothic fiction as well as drama, while also influencing theoretical speculations on theatre, painting, and illustration.

³ Cfr. Vernon Lee, Il Settecento in Italia - Accademie - Musica - Teatro. Riccardo Ricciardi, Napoli, 1932, p.191:

L'opera fu un necessario prodotto dell'Italia; esisteva in germe nell'essenza della lingua, e si sviluppò grazie alla pressione stessa della cultura italiana. (...) La lingua si componeva da sé in cadenze regolari, ostili agli accenti fluttuanti dell'emozione; il popolo desiderava forme artificiose e ben definite, incompatibili con gli slanci e le scosse dell'azione tragica.

⁴ Cfr. ibidem:

What Apostolo Zeno tried to achieve was to operate a sort of transfusion of the classicist artistic values of tragedy into a light, frivolous theatrical form which was held in very low regard by the world of Italian high culture. Zeno had a strong dramatic instinct for direct action, simple plots and highly effective scenes.⁵ He undertook a task (to be later completed with magisterial perfection by Metastasio⁶) of re-ordering and re-arranging a native and absolutely original artistic product into a firmer pattern, though preserving aspects which were radically opposed to traditional classicist principles, such as for example the non-observance of the Aristotelian rules. The constant violation of the unity of place, justified by the authors on the grounds that the various places shown on stage were so near that they could be reached within twenty-four hours, equally involved the violation of the unity of time and, as a direct consequence, the unity of action. As Vernon Lee⁷ explains:

(...) siccome la scena cambia continuamente e gli attori appaiono ora in un bosco, ora in un palazzo, ora in un tempio,⁸ non c'è assolutamente nessun indizio che riveli al pubblico se la scena del bosco avvenga lo stesso giorno, la stessa settimana, lo stesso mese, perfino lo stesso anno di quella del palazzo; e dato che non c'è

La vera tragedia, quella che c'era già in Inghilterra e in Spagna, forse sarebbe stata impossibile in Italia, dove la lingua prendeva spontaneamente inflessioni musicali e il popolo per sua natura ricercava il piacere artistico. (...) Gli italiani scrissero e recitarono molte tragedie, dal medioevale Ezzelino del Mussato giù giù fino alla Merope del Maffei. Ma queste tragedie erano lavori d'imitazioni, dovuti all'idea che quello che era stato fatto dagli antichi doveva essere ripetuto dai moderni: non erano il risultato di un bisogno sentito da tutta la nazione, furono scritte, recitate, applaudite e pubblicate, una dopo l'altra in rapida successione, ma non determinarono il formarsi di un teatro permanente; erano opera e trastullo di accademie e di Corti erudite: il resto della popolazione non le desiderava e non le notava. Potevano esser costruite con la massima cura, scritte con la massima eloquenza, declamate con tutta l'arte: era tutto inutile: né i versi del Poliziano e del Tasso, né l'esperta recitazione degli attori accademici, né gli ingegnosi artifici scenici del Peruzzi e del Palladio riuscirono a fare della tragedia una necessità vera, un vero piacere per gli italiani.

⁵ Cfr. in this connection the comparative survey in Appendix I.

⁶ Cfr. an anonymous "Prefazione" to a Raccolta di tragedie scritte nel secolo 18^o. Vol.I, Società Tipografica di Classici Italiani, Milano, 1825, p.V:

(...) la meravigliosa riuscita dell'Opera in musica, la quale, trovata in Italia, invase ben presto tutte le scene dell'Europa, pose un nuovo ostacolo al coltivamento della Tragedia; tanto più che i bei drammi di Zeno, e quelli più mirabili di Metastasio parevano tener luogo di regolari tragedie.

⁷ Cfr. ibidem, V. Lee, op.cit., p.200.

⁸ Cfr. the comparative survey in Appendix I.

percezione dei limiti di tempo, e che nessuno sa con esattezza quando avvengano le variazioni, non c'è più ragione che queste azioni non siano anche una dozzina, tutte intrecciate tra loro: congiure, contro-congiure, uccisioni, rimorsi, vendette, errori, riconoscimenti e complicazioni, che basterebbero a riempire molti anni di una vita umana.

All this entailed that, far from following the rules of regular coherent tragedy, "dramma per musica" was a fragmentary and complex structure defying all three unities, and the next step towards betraying Aristototele was all too natural:

(...) giacchè tanti fatti e tanti intrecci sono concentrati in un sol dramma, giacchè l'azione non è una ma son tante, perchè non rinunziare al canone aristotelico del procedere di bene in male e di male in peggio? perchè non soddisfare i nobili cavalieri e le nobili dame, riuniti a festeggiare uno spotalizio a una nascita, e i cittadini e gli artigiani venuti a divertirsi per Carnevale o per l'Ascensione, nessuno dei quali ha voglia di sentir moralizzare? perchè non appagare il loro desiderio d'impressioni piacevoli facendo procedere il dramma dal peggio al meglio, o per lo meno facendolo finir bene? Perchè no? Ed ecco sorgere così un'altra corrotta eresia: alle fini tragiche si sostituiscono quelle allegre.

If we consider the case of Zeno's Ambleto and Shakespeare's Hamlet, we distinctly see the enormous gap separating the superb Elizabethan revenge tragedy and the middle-rate Italian 18th century "dramma per musica". A very basic difference is of course the diametrically opposed ending, as well as many other elements⁹, but there is one thing they can be said to have in common: an anticipation of the Romantic quality of popular art, created for the pleasure of the audience and not out of sophisticated abstract formulas concocted by theatre critics.¹⁰

This theatrical genre half-way between literature and music, which represented a mass phenomenon of enormous proportions and was the target of numberless polemical attacks on the part of most Italian men of letters, was in a striking contrast with canonized forms of literary culture such as poetry, prose, and tragedy, which were confined to restricted intellectual élites.

⁹ Cfr. Appendix I.

¹⁰ Cfr. V. Lee, op.cit., p.199:

L'opera, elaborata da Apostolo Zeno e perfezionata dal Metastasio, non è una produzione classica come la tragedia francese o italiana, costruita secondo supposti precetti aristotelici e in aperta imitazione dell'antico: è un prodotto romantico, nello stesso senso in cui sono romantici i drammi dello Shakespeare e di Calderon; nacque senza che i dotti se ne accorgessero e poté crescere senza esser molestata da loro; e ricevè una parvenza esteriore di correttezza classica solo dopo essersi già pienamente ed individualmente sviluppata.

New cultural groups began to appear in Italy at the end of the 17th century, with the explicit purpose of reforming Italian cultural life under the traditional name of Academies and, by the beginning of the 18th century, they were disseminated all over the country.¹¹ They were the only existing cultural centres of their time, but unfortunately they were also isolated from one another like many ivory towers, where the vanity of each little group could be gratified in a most sterile way. However, the advantage was that for the first time different social categories were being mixed together.¹² This situation began to change radically in the early years of the 18th century, through the efforts of a group of intellectuals under the leadership of Ludovico Antonio Muratori. He realized that it was necessary to link the academies together in one unified network constituting "una sola accademia e repubblica letteraria" through which the whole cultural system, from literature to education, to the press, and the theatre could be revitalized. All this implied that for the first time Italian intellectuals chose to commit themselves actively in society and felt they ought to assume new practical responsibilities.

At the same time another influential and very progressive man of letters, the Neapolitan Gianvincenzo Gravina (Metastasio's teacher and adoptive father) was also trying to set up a healthier cultural system in reaction to the excesses of 17th century Marinism. In 1692, under the protection of Queen Christine of Sweden, Gravina and his group (with the bureaucratic leadership of Gravina's rival, the pedantic Roman priest, Gian Mario dei Crescimbeni) founded the Academy of Arcadia in Rome, advocating a return to reason and good taste symbolized in the natural simplicity of pastoral life.¹³ Their

¹¹ "L'Italie seule a plus d'académies que tout le reste du monde ensemble" is the ironical comment under the article Académie in the first volume of the Encyclopédie, published in 1751.

¹² For a description of Italian academies, cfr. Vernon Lee, *op.cit.*, p.3:

(...) innumerevoli accademie, reticolati di vita molecolare (...) abbracciavano tutta l'Italia e mettevano in comunicazione fra loro tutte quelle classi sociali che possedevano, o passavano per possedere, qualche nozione di letteratura. Queste accademie erano infinite e multiformi: se ne vedevano sorgere e tramontare da tutte le parti, sboccate sia da pomposi ricevimenti in casa di cardinali e principesse, sia da turbolente gozzoviglie in caffè letterari. (...) avevano nomi che erano allusioni, indovinelli, scherzetti e parole d'un gergo speciale, come I Trasformati di Milano; I Gelidi di Bologna; Gli Intronati di Siena; I Pastori Eritrei di Napoli; I Flemmatici; I Frigidi; I Fervidi; Gli Ubriachi.

¹³ Cfr. Il teatro italiano nel Settecento, a cura di G. Guccini, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1988, Introduzione, p.9: "A partire dai proclami arcadici non c'è quasi letterato che non prenda la distanza dal secolo corrotto e

ambition was to produce a new classicist theory stressing the moral aspect of poetry and inspired by a dogmatic faith in the Ancients, since the Moderns, whatever their country, had only corrupted art. From Rome, the Arcadia Academy spread all over Italy through its local branches called "colonie". This network, closely recalling Muratori's project, actually succeeded in establishing its hegemony over the entire Italian cultural system.

In order to have a comprehensive picture of 18th century Italian literature¹⁴ it is important to keep in mind Croce's fundamental idea that modern Italian history starts in the last thirty years of the 17th century with the beginning of the Arcadian-rationalist period, which continued through the first half of the 18th century and prepared the way for the following period, the Enlightenment. Successively, as the Enlightenment entered a crisis a new phase started, with the new pre-Romantic wave, announcing the imminent flowering of the Romantic movement, right after the turn of the century.

However, it is also important to remember that each one of these successive phases, although it was characterized in a specific way, also included germs of development of the following one.

Contemporary critical attitudes tend to stress this position and to reject, in this case, Croce's view according to which 18th century Italian literature as a whole is unified by a strictly coherent Arcadian imprint, with the exception of Alfieri's work. Such generalizations are not accepted today, and critics tend to emphasize the passage from Arcadian poetry, centred on classicist humanism and culminating in a poet like Metastasio (but also including minor poets like Antonio Conti and Paolo Rolli) to the poetry of the Enlightenment with its humanitarian commitment, its Sensist philosophy, its high social and moral sense, its speculations on poetics which are all reflected around 1760 in Lombardy, in the major poet of the period, Giuseppe Parini.

licenzioso. Gli ideali di pochi anni prima vengono declassati (...); l'appellativo "marinista" diviene un'offesa."

¹⁴ Cfr. W. Binni, "Caratteri e fasi della letteratura italiana del Settecento", in Storia della letteratura italiana. Vol. VI, Garzanti, Milano, 1968, pp.309.325.

The second half of the century, after Alfieri's pre-Romantic anticipations, is more strongly linked with the imminent new era of Romanticism brought about shortly afterwards by the work of Foscolo, Manzoni, and Leopardi, but even in the first part of the century new fertile elements should not be overlooked: above all the strong moral and cultural drive towards renewing traditional values, also the need for a new conception of art, nearer to contemporary European cultural trends, and directed towards a rational control of 17th century excesses in the name of simple elegance, clarity and good taste¹⁵ and also towards establishing a new link between words and things. Paradoxically, just at the moment when methods and instruments of historical research were being renewed, Italian intellectuals chose to reject the previous historical period and go back to the golden age of 16th century Renaissance, reviving a glorious past through an impressive display of erudition, since only through learning could a new social and cultural identity be built.

It is easier to understand the complex nature of the new literary developments if the very different regional contexts, personal situations and problems are explored. If we consider, for example, in the southern area, Gravina's peculiar mixture of moral rigour, democratic commitment and classical poetics, Vico's powerful philosophical thought appears to have been assimilated as an important source of it. In the same way elements of Galileo's thought appear to be incorporated in the Tuscan Arcadian school of Redi and Menzini, who inherit some of their ironic realism from the Renaissance tradition. As for the North of Italy, Arcadian rationalism appears to be pervaded by a strong undercurrent of religious feeling (more jesuitically-minded in De Lemene, more austere and authentic in Maggi) in a harmonious relationship between morals and poetics and between truth and beauty, which reached its highest point in the pragmatic aesthetic criticism of Muratori and Maffei, in Zeno's drama, in Marcello's witty satire. Apart from regional characteristics,

¹⁵ Cfr. G. Guccini, *op.cit.*, p.10:

Il recupero del passato e l'assimilazione critica delle culture europee emergenti - e in particolar modo di quella francese - produssero ampi cambiamenti di orizzonti, che coinvolsero, però, solo sezioni estremamente sottili della complessa civiltà italiana (...). Il primo effetto del reinserimento europeo fu dunque un nuovo e ramificato 'bel mondo' della cultura che accomunando aristocratici, dottori universitari, letterati ed ecclesiastici, determinò in Italia un polo d'influenza sociale analogo a quelli costituiti in Francia e soprattutto in Inghilterra dall'emergere della classe borghese.

there was everywhere a pervasive polemical attitude against hypocrisy, against the semi-feudal habits of baroque society still based on arbitrary violence, against the separation of women in society. This movement towards new ideas and new habits, inspired by the rising middle class and, in the initial period also by the aristocracy, found many obstacles on its way and its development was hampered by conformism in all its forms but, even if slowly, it finally emerged as a real influence in society.

On the other hand, the first Arcadian period, so rich in its manifold commitments, also had limits which could not be overcome, such as moralism (Muratori's attack on Molière as an impious and immoral author is an example), or an excessive faith in the reform of poetry to be achieved purely by means of intellect and will, or enthusiasm for any literary product, as long as it was anti-baroque. At the same time, new versions of 16th century Mannerism or derivative products from baroque grandiosity were mistaken for a triumphant revival of classicism in a new modern form.

Another dangerous Arcadian tendency, leading in time to the final decadence of the movement, began to appear very early while the first brilliant phase was in full swing: a sort of pseudo-poetry based on a conventional idea of poetical exercise as a social duty proliferated unrestrainedly, especially under Crescimbeni's and later Frugoni's influence in Rome, soon degenerating into encomiastic praise of those in power, or in vaguely childlike celebrations of the most futile and frivolous subjects.¹⁶ What seems to lie at the root of this future deterioration is the basic Arcadian doctrine summed up in the maxim: "Non consistere la nobiltà della poesia nell'altezza dei concetti, ma nella bontà dell'imitazione".¹⁷ According to this doctrine no idea, unless consecrated by usage, and no form, unless copied from venerable models, could be admitted. Consequently, if

¹⁶ This uninspired poetic production was to become one of the favourite targets of the aggressive Italian critic of the Enlightenment period, Giuseppe Baretti (the future champion of Shakespeare against Voltaire), who from his London exile thundered against Arcadia, influenced by his great friend Dr. Johnson, a constant detractor of pastoral poetry.

¹⁷ Cfr. G. Bertana, *In Arcadia*, Napoli, 1909.

creation meant imitation the inevitable result was a progressively wide separation between literature and life.

Such limitations, while tending to impoverish themes and motifs current in the very first period of Arcadia, were, however, very effective in adapting the possibilities of reform to the needs of a generation whose taste for a pleasant and lively social life expressed a wise, balanced optimism, moderate erotic inclinations, and a great love for music and singing. In this context the pastoral convention, however ambiguous, was the channel through which, even if in a most prudent and concealed way, a renewal of social values inspired by "ingenuous" nature could take place.

Positive Arcadian characteristics such as the conjunction of rationalism with a pathetic-idyllic sentimentality, the use of a neat classical style, an atmosphere of cosy domestic realism where lively anxieties were balanced by the inevitable happy ending, found their highest expression in Metastasio's work,¹⁸ an achievement, which in its mature phase, marked the period of Arcadia's greatest splendour, before the beginning of its decadence, in the 1730s and 1740s.

In a different sphere of literary activity, the press, the most important achievement of the Arcadian reforming commitment was the founding in 1710 of the Giornale de'letterati d'Italia by Apostolo Zeno, Scipione Maffei and Antonio Vallisnieri. Besides its activity of clarification and promotion of the reform movement in Italian letters (in addition to serving as propaganda against the French cultural predominance), the Giornale also performed the important function of noting and reviewing outstanding foreign books, especially those concerned with Italian subjects, thus providing a kind of rallying point for all those concerned with the rehabilitation of the Italian literary reputation all over Europe.

Moreover, through the Giornale's intermediation between authors and readers, a wholly new relationship with the reading public was established, relying on an integration of moral as well as economic values. It was no longer a purely hedonistic search for

¹⁸ Even the harshest critic of "dramma per musica", Muratori, was bound to recognize around 1735 that Metastasio had overcome all his objections to the genre (incoherence, mixture of different styles, improbable plots and characters, excessive eroticism, predominance of music over poetry).

popularity depending on the whims of popular taste. A first embryo of a modern theory of information appeared, through which the cultural message could reach the public in a number of different ways, but a most important element was also introduced: the reading public was no longer a passive receiver, it was an interlocutor actively implicated in a far-reaching plan for the foundation of a new culture.¹⁹ But intellectuals were not only beginning to build a specific new professional identity for themselves as a social group, no longer restricted to the aristocracy and aware of the new European culture, they also succeeded in establishing the hegemony of Italian lay culture, kept until then in a marginal position by the all-pervasive Catholic culture of the Counter-Reformation.

This common program was carried out in many different ways, varying with different temperaments, outlooks and regional environments. In Venice Apostolo Zeno²⁰ was in a first-rank position in the reforming battle as the co-founder of the Giornale de' letterati d'Italia, of which he edited the first 31 volumes (until 1718) with enormous success, soon becoming an important reference point for intellectuals all over Northern Italy.²¹

In Verona, Scipione Maffei, also a co-founder of the Giornale, belonging to an important aristocratic family, used his own privileged aristocratic status with great ability as a means of cultural hegemony. From the point of view of his personal experience as an untiring promoter of culture, Maffei complained bitterly about the tendency of "molti

¹⁹ Cfr. C. De Michelis, Letterati e lettori nel Settecento veneziano, Olschki, Firenze, 1979, p.21: Nasce così, timidamente, una moderna teoria dell'informazione che punterà ad agire contemporaneamente con mezzi diversi, ma organicamente integrabili sul destinatario: da un lato si arricchiranno e moltiplicheranno le biblioteche pubbliche e private, si rinnoveranno i programmi di studio di ogni ordine di scuola, si rivitalizzeranno i centri di ricerca, dai monasteri alle università, alle accademie, dall'altro si trasformerà l'editoria, preparandola a produrre i nuovi libri di testo (...) a pubblicare i risultati delle moderne ricerche (...) a dotarsi attraverso i giornali, degli strumenti di informazione e propaganda necessari all'allargamento e al consolidamento del pubblico (...).

²⁰ On this subject, cfr. C. De Michelis, op.cit., p.47-48: Lo Zeno, nella sua attività di poeta melodrammatico, come poi in quella di giornalista, è probabilmente il primo letterato italiano che, prima di cedere alla logica del mecenatismo, si impegna a trasformare il proprio rapporto con il pubblico, riconoscendo in esso non solo un capriccioso committente (...) ma un più attento interlocutore.

²¹ Cfr. B. Dooley, "Pietro Pariati a Venezia", in La carriera di un librettista, a cura di G. Gronda, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990, p.41.

sublimi intelletti", who "fatti semplici spettatori, dal por mano alla penna del tutto alieni si mostrino".²² Maffei's opinion was that this is the typical attitude of those intellectuals who preferred to be silent rather than incur the rigours of censorship and attributed it to the socio-economic factors conditioning cultural activities in early 18th century Italy.

A typical example of the type of intellectual described by Maffei was the Venetian Antonio Conti (a future member of the scanty group of Italians who were to have direct contact with Shakespeare's plays). From the start of his career, he gave up all pragmatic ambitions and declared that, above all things, he loved "la mia quiete e la contemplazione della verità", adding that "Di buon grado rinunzio a tutti gli agi, a tutti gli onori, a tutte le ricchezze, quando si tratti di perder l'una o lasciar l'altra".²³ He attempted coherently to carry on his intellectual career, but he never exploited his cosmopolitan experience of 13 years spent in English and French top cultural milieux, pursuing his scientific, philosophical and literary interests, so much in advance in respect of the Italian cultural world.

In striking contrast with Conti's solitary work, Crescimbeni worked in Rome as a busy mediator of culture, perfectly integrated in the Pope's reactionary system of political power. On the opposite political side, but equally deep-rooted in their Neapolitan society, were Gravina and Giannone, radical thinkers actively sharing in all the struggles and final defeat of the Neapolitan "popolo civile". Gravina then settled in Rome and played an important role in the elaboration of Arcadian poetics²⁴, on a quite different level from the

²² Cfr. M. Ariani, *Drammaturgia e mitopoiesi. Antonio Conti scrittore*. Bulzoni, Roma, 1977, p. 17.

²³ Cfr. a private letter written in 1699 at the age of 22, quoted by M. Ariani, *op.cit.*, p. 17. It must be noted that this personal inclination was to be reinforced later in life, when returning to Venice after 13 years abroad, the Inquisition was to secretly start a suit against him for his dangerous free-thinking in matters of philosophy, politics and religion, and he was only to escape arrest (differently from his bourgeois friend Giannone, caught while being in his company and subsequently condemned) thanks to his position as a member of the small country gentry, and the protection of friends from the high aristocracy.

²⁴ Gravina's fundamental work *Ragion Poetica* (1708), a milestone in the history of Italian criticism, is defined as follows in G. Ortolani, "Appunti per la storia della riforma del teatro" in Guccini, *op.cit.*, p. 87:

...il Gravina, facendo argine alle aberrazioni dell'arte del Seicento, e rivendicando l'importanza della poesia nell'umana società, richiamava gl'Italiani all'ammirazione e allo studio dei capolavori antichi. Prima del Vico egli ha riconosciuto la grandezza del mondo omerico e del mondo dantesco; primo ha saputo delineare in breve il quadro della poesia greca, latina, italiana; primo nel Settecento ha tracciato ai connazionali il programma della letteratura classica. Così egli riaffermava il nostro antico primato contro la critica straniera.

degraded condition to which Arcadian poetry was to descend in the period of crisis of 1730-1740.

In the north of Italy and more precisely in Modena, Ludocino Antonio Muratori was an extraordinary example of intellectual commitment in the Arcadian-rationalist period. In his status as an ecclesiastical scholar, he tried in every way to rationalize the historical-juridical bases of the Church and of public institutions, while soon becoming an obligatory reference point for all kinds of Italian cultural controversies.

Paolo Rolli (also a future member of the Italian Shakespearian chosen few) started his career in Rome as a militant Arcadian and continued it in England, working there for thirty years. His poetry seemed to anticipate future developments which would take place towards the middle of the century, when Arcadia was supplanted by the new Enlightenment system of poetic values. A faithful follower of Gravina, Rolli mitigated the austere severity of his teaching by taking a more hedonistic direction, while also following Gravina's example in his great interest in ancient classical poetry.²⁵ His rationalist love of order and concrete clarity of representation, in a constant search for evident plastic values²⁶ was later reinforced by his contact with English empiricism, during his long stay in England.²⁷

²⁵ Cfr. in this connection W. Binni, "La letteratura nell'epoca arcadico-razionalistica", Storia della letteratura italiana, op.cit., p.405:

(...) importa confermare come nello sviluppo della poesia rolliana le posizioni graviniane, in parte accolte scolasticamente, siano risolte in un compromesso efficace ed educativo per il "piacere detti orecchi" mai rinnegato ma invero in un canto ben ancorato ad una esigenza di espressione di gioia e di letizia edonistica e (...) come (...) il crescente riferimento alla civiltà artistica antica rappresentino un momento essenziale nello sviluppo della poesia arcadica in direzione classicistica come anticipo di una nuova fase poi chiaramente attuata dal Savioli e portata su un piano più illuministico e impegnativo dal primo Parini.

²⁶ Cfr. V. Lee, op.cit., p.24:

Mentre i suoi (Rolli's) contemporanei scrivevano in rime fiacche e slegate, egli fu il primo a comporre endecasillabi italiani; mentre quelli si contentavano del contorno, appena accennato, d'un paesaggio convenzionale, egli faceva le più dettagliate descrizioni di fichi dai fianchi spaccati, del crepitio delle coccole di ginepro che bruciano, del profumo del vino di Monte Porzio, del peso dei poponi maturi; mentre quelli componevano canzoni sulla beatificazione dei santi, egli scrisse un inno a Venere, che è una accozzaglia d'imitazioni dei più svariati autori dell'antichità, ma non manca di un certo tono pagano, panteistico, che è raro trovare prima di Goethe.

Another interesting reference to Goethe is also made by V. Lee in connection with the most famous of Rolli's poems:

(...) una sua poesia è divenuta una specie di reliquia per esser stata collegata con un grande poeta: la canzonetta "Solitario Bosco Ombroso" fu infatti una delle preferite di Frau Rath, che l'insegnò al piccolo Goethe prima ancora che questi sapesse una parola d'italiano. (ibidem, p.26)

Pier Jacopo Martello moved from his native Bologna to Rome, where he became a member of Arcadia. A great popularizer of French literature and author of tragedies, he elaborated a dramatic language in which he tried to find a balance between French naturalness and Italian emphasis. The result was a new verse form ("verso martelliano"), inspired by the French alexandrine, widely adopted throughout the 18th century, in spite of the unfavourable opinion of many Italian scholars.²⁸

An early reaction to the growing degradation of Arcadian ideals and practice can be seen in the fact that around the second decade of the century some of the most important Arcadian exponents (Maffei, Rolli, Conti, Algarotti) started to go abroad in an energetic search for new directions in the fields of science, philosophy, or pure erudition. In order to get in touch with the latest cultural advances and acquire a truly European identity, they soon become active members of the movement leading to the Enlightenment.

In the wake of this movement, a new conception of poetry as philosophical meditation and didactic sermonizing in the Horatian style gave birth to the figure of the poet-philosopher, dedicated to the popularization of the new Enlightenment culture. This attitude is reflected in the attacks on Arcadia which started to appear more and more frequently. Algarotti's lively satire (*Il tempio di Venere*, 1745) against Arcadian poetry and its abstract petrarchism and platonism, in favour of a more committed and reformed literary form, was a sort of up-to-date revival of the old Arcadian arguments against 17th century literature, enriched by a deeper and larger range of cultural interests. Arcadian classicism was also revived in a more rational and modern form, in the exaltation of the classicist values of nature, virtue and freedom seen in a new light.

²⁷ Cfr. V. Lee, op.cit., p.25.

²⁸ Cfr. W. Binni, op.cit., p.402:

Si noti (...) che nel periodo inglese il naturale gusto del pittorico venne accresciuto dall'esperienza di una cultura più empiristica, al contatto con un'arte classicistica e razionalistica (fra Addison e Pope) tesa a captare e tradurre in elegante, classica concisione impressioni della realtà, e a descrivere nitidamente ambienti, oggetti e persone, magari in funzione satirica, ma sempre con il compiacimento della rappresentazione perspicua e ben rilevata.

Prose started to be perceived as the best-suited instrument in the battle for new ideas, while poetry was charged with new significant cultural and philosophical references culminating in the high civil commitment of Parini's work. In his Discorso sulla poesia and his dialogue Della Nobiltà (centred on the figure of the plebeian poet), Parini summed up his conception of a new poetry, its practical use, and its impact on reality. An echo of the early Arcadian polemical attitude against 17th century bad taste, stylistic excesses and immorality can be felt in Parini, but with a heightened awareness of the nature of the period as influenced by the Spanish oppressive domination and by the obscurantist atmosphere brought about by the Catholic counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent. As already mentioned, the revolution in taste leading to the Enlightenment was a gradual process in which not all Arcadian elements suddenly disappeared: many of them persisted but were transformed by the general atmosphere of openly unprejudiced freedom of thought.

The new classicism revived by the Enlightenment was expressed in a lively, gay, playful conception of life, as for example in Savioli's Amori (1758-1765) and only faded when pre-Romanticism (with Bertola), neoclassicism (with Cerretti and Mazza), imposing decorative compositions (with Monti) began to dominate the literary scene.

When reviving the Horatian maxim "utile dulci" in his ode La salubrità dell'aria ("va per negletta via/ognor l'util cercando/ la calda fantasia/ che sol felice è quando/ l'util unir può al vanto/ di lusinghevol canto") Parini was conscious that, through new technical means, he was formulating a new poetics which aimed at expressing in a Sensist-classicist language a courageous reforming commitment which would have a concrete impact on reality. In this way Parini represents the clearest and most commanding voice of the Enlightenment in 18th century Italy.

On an equally high level, another crucial poetical experience stands out in the same central years of the century: Goldoni's comic theatre. Goldoni went through an initial Arcadian phase in close touch with the lively discussions about the theatre reforms suggested by Muratori, Maffei and Marcello; then, during his stay in Tuscany, he witnessed the practical results of the progressive Molièresque theatre of Gigli, Fagioli and

Nelli. Back in Venice, although not as favoured as Parini in terms of an enlightened environment, he contributed to the establishment of a new atmosphere in accordance with the latest advances of Enlightenment culture by introducing up-to-date elements of a popular democratic spirit, advocating a healthier, freer and more dignified type of life for all social categories. He loved his city and brilliantly described the smallest details of its organization (e.g. the roughened stones in the streets, to prevent the pavement from becoming slippery), out of a pervading optimism and admiration for all concrete human activities. He strongly opposed scholasticism, mysticism, superstitions and pedantry, basing his theatre reform on what was true, natural and earthly. However, Goldoni's Enlightenment ideology only found its most complete expression in his Mémoires, written some years later in Paris after the failure of his hopes of renewing Italian theatre.

Parini therefore played a more central role than Goldoni in the Italian Enlightenment, also being favoured, as mentioned before, by the progressive Lombard environment, much in advance in respect of other parts of Italy, where conservative and confessional forces were still very active. Lombardy was certainly the liveliest centre of Enlightenment thought in Italy in the memorable decade 1760-1770. The search for human freedom, dignity and autonomy was taken up with an extraordinary energy by the group led by Pietro Verri, his brother Alessandro (later to become the most enthusiastic among the few worshippers of Shakespeare in Italy) and Cesare Beccaria, founders of the combative Accademia dei Pugni (1761), the program of which, summarized in the famous slogan "Cose non parole" tended to apply general philosophical principles to the liberalization of daily life and customs. The activity of the group was later to be reinforced through the use of a new, agile instrument like their periodical Il Caffé (1764-1766). At the same time, an uninterrupted flow of travellers, mostly thinkers, scholars, and reformers went all over Europe, exploring countries, and studying concrete social and cultural aspects of European civilizations. Their rich prose production in some cases challenged the confines of enlightened despotism, looking towards the revolutionary dream of Jacobinism.

If, as already mentioned, a global conception of the 18th century as wholly Arcadian is insufficient, it is also insufficient to see the second part of the century as completely dominated by Enlightenment ideas, because in the wake of those same ideas new elements began to emerge which could be already traced in the Verri-Beccaria group (especially in Alessandro's case) in the form of Sensist influence which tended to erode the firm optimism of the iron circle Nature-Reason and Pleasure-Virtue. There was a growing consciousness of a painful sensibility, of the value of sentiments, of generous illusions, of the rights of the heart, tending to overthrow the balance of reasonableness.

The same elements can be found in the field of literary criticism in Bettinelli's essay Dell'entusiasmo delle belle arti (1769)²⁹, in Baretti's aggressive critical review La frusta letteraria (1763-1766), published during a short stay in Italy, in Melchiorre Cesarotti's Saggio sulla filosofia delle lingue (1800). In all these works enthusiasm and genius were exalted against cold reason and rules, national and individual characteristics of language were underlined, ugliness, as long as it was natural and strongly characterized was equal to beauty, and finally the discovery of Shakespeare as the sum of all these elements at last came to the surface. The clandestine, subterranean knowledge of Shakespeare confined to a few, isolated individuals finally ended with the publication in England of Baretti's Discours sur Shakespeare et M.de Voltaire (1777).

A new fertile phase of European contacts centred on the powerful appeal of Rousseau's pre-Romantic doctrine began, which was to be seen not so much as an importation of foreign ideas into the Italian literary system, but as an answer to internal growing needs for a reaction to traditional classicist positions. Although classicism still operated as a moderating influence on the new pre-Romantic themes, these latter could no longer be considered, as they used to be, as a lugubrious, nocturnal version of Arcadia. On the other hand, both new critical attitudes and sentimental themes

²⁹ Bettinelli, however was still very far from a violent break with tradition and in a later essay Saggio sull'eloquenza he did not succeed in finding a solution and decisively opting for a wholly free conception of creativity in the Romantic sense.

stimulated by the translations of foreign pre-Romantic works cannot be considered as coherent developments of Enlightenment poetics. In fact, Alfieri, Foscolo and later Leopardi experienced these developments as polemically opposed to the core of Enlightenment civilization and transmitted their heritage to the early 19th century Romantic period. Especially in Alfieri's case the pre-Romantic element was an enrichment of his basic Enlightenment outlook, allowing him to deepen his conception of liberty, of poetry, and of man. This was the source of his great tragic poetry: not a derivative literary experience, but a living human experience due to a painful spiritual crisis, and to the clash between Alfieri's proto-Romantic personality and the limitations of reality, against any providential, optimistic conception inspired by either religion or Enlightenment philosophy. It is undeniable that new tensions existed in Italy and exploded violently within the century in Alfieri and Foscolo, harshly opposing reason to passion, optimism to pessimism, illusion to philosophy.

In the sphere of literary criticism the most important contribution to pre-Romantic poetics came from the stimulating translations of pre-Romantic texts and, in the most marked way, from Cesarotti's translation of the Ossian Poems. Those poems offered an inexhaustible mine of new ideas and themes (oppressively intense feelings connected with death and night, wild natural landscapes, sorrow, solitary tombs, primitive heroism) which were exploited in Alfieri's and Leopardi's great poetry, enriching Italian literature through new poetical rhythms and metres, within the frame of the "loose" endecasyllable, perfectly suited to the melancholy elegiac mood of an epoch of crisis. These pre-Romantic elements were counterbalanced by neoclassical inclinations in minor authors (Bertola, Pindemonte) but recovered their primitive strength in Alfieri, Monti, and, after the turn of the century, culminated in Foscolo's Jacopo Ortis. Alfieri's protest against arid rationalism was echoed in Cesarotti's love for the "sublime" and in Monti's exaltation of neoclassical grandiosity, which however revived typical aspects of the first Arcadian heroic phase.

The end of the century is characterized by two opposite trends: Parini's neoclassicism and Alfieri's pre-Romanticism. While the former reflects a harmonious,

balanced vision of the Enlightenment, the latter reflects a tormented, ambivalent position of pre-Romantic revolt incorporating, however, deeply assimilated elements of the Enlightenment culture. These different tendencies illustrate the complex nature of the Italian Settecento, which was not only a period of intense preparatory work culminating in the early 19th century Romantic movement, but also a period of rich autonomous literary production.

The Theatre Question

Throughout the 18th century, one of the most important critical controversies was centred on theatre. This was not due to chance, as three of the most important authors of the period, Metastasio, Goldoni, and Alfieri were playwrights and this happened only in that century. This seems to confirm the hypothesis¹ that theatre was a constant component of 18th century Italian culture, so that its development can easily be followed in all its phases. Metastasio, whose most fertile period of activity was during the first half of the century, succeeded in giving poetic value to the discredited (but popular) genre of "dramma per musica", after Zeno's reform had given it some literary dignity. Between 1748 and 1762, Goldoni's reform of comedy took place, rescuing this genre from the very low level to which Commedia dell'Arte had fallen. Finally, from 1745 to 1787, Alfieri ensured that tragedy took its due place in the Italian theatre, after a long succession of failed hopes and aspirations on the part of innumerable Italian authors (Maffei's Merope (1713) being the only example of popular success).

At first sight, these changes appear to be coincidental with the generally accepted picture of 18th century culture developing from the Arcadian era under the banner of good taste and moderation, then proceeding to the Enlightenment era and its new attitude to social problems and, finally, to the pre-Romantic wave with its new critical stance and sensibility. In fact, the picture was far from being so straightforward, as demonstrated, for example, by the difficult relationships with public institutions and by personal polemics. Goldoni in particular, was the object of violent attacks from his rivals Chiari and Gozzi; symptoms of crisis can be found in the biographies of the three playwrights, as all spent crucial years of their lives abroad: Metastasio in Vienna, Goldoni in Paris, Alfieri on a pilgrimage through Europe.

Another important phenomenon was the separation of stage life and theatre criticism, that can be traced back to the end of the 16th century and which had

¹ Cfr. M. Baratto, La letteratura teatrale del Settecento in Italia. Neri Pozza, Venezia, 1985, pp.12-18.

developed into a totally uncommunicative relationship by the early 18th century with regard to the two most popular forms of theatre: Commedia dell'Arte and "dramma per musica". As they grew in popularity, both in Italy and throughout Europe, they were viewed by theatre critics with growing hostility. While on the one hand critics failed to realise the importance of the spread of these theatrical forms through Europe, they did not fail to notice a gap² in the development of Italian theatre, in comparison with the theatres of Spain, England and France. This gap, according to contemporary critical studies³ can be explained by an implicit contradiction in the history of Italian theatre, starting as early as the 16th century, when a whole new theatre was developed in Italy and exported to the rest of Europe. From theatre-building to stage-designing, music and acting, so much was invented in Italy, but no progress at all was made in the writing of texts. While in Spain, England and France a concrete dialogue between authors and audience was established, and theatre succeeded in performing an important and necessary social function, the same development did not take place in Italy, where the separation between literature and theatre became increasingly wider.

According to one of the hypotheses attempting to explain this problem, the development of modern theatre in Italy was hindered by the Italian language itself and its 16th century codification along literary and classicist lines, in opposition to the spoken language and the large variety of regional dialects. This "questione di lingua" later persisting until the 19th century (the only exception being Goldoni's agile, concrete communicative language), seems also to be the reason why the original contribution of Italy to European theatre consisted of three genres: pastoral drama, "commedia dell'arte" and "dramma per musica". This is Carlo Dionisotti's thesis, summed up as follows:

² Muratori was the first to denounce this gap and to advocate as the supreme aim of tragic theatre, the noblest of all theatrical forms, "il fin Politico del vero Teatro, cioè nel giovare al popolo" (*Della perfetta poesia italiana*, t.II, p.76). He saw tragedy as a "rappresentazione regolata dalla Politica, e indirizzata all'utile de' Cittadini" (ibidem, p.61) and therefore as a means of awakening virtuous passions in their souls.

³ Cfr. M. Baratto, op.cit., p.20.

Mi pare lecito concludere che da questi tre casi tipici, diversi e indipendenti, risulta una costante riluttanza della lingua ad accettare un dialogo drammatico aderente alla realtà storica. La lingua accetta senza riserve il dramma pastorale, perchè da esso riceve una garanzia che quella realtà, come presenza necessaria e diretta, è esclusa. Nella realtà tragicomica, a volte tragica, sempre e comunque nobile, del melodramma, la lingua si avventura con felice prudenza, solo in quanto la musica l'assista. Di fronte a una realtà comica, che non permette evasioni né compromessi, la lingua rifiuta la scrittura, si concede solo nella forma labile, parzialmente dialettale, della improvvisazione dei comici di mestiere.⁴

When discussing the problems of theatre, Italian intellectuals of the Arcadian-rationalist phase⁵ (Muratori, Martello, Gravina, Maffei) chose not to mediate between theory and practice and made no effort to propose scenic models suited to both the technical experience and economic possibilities of the actors. On the contrary, they adopted a negative attitude towards popular theatre forms, as if theatre were a sort of discipline or science in which wrong principles were to be authoritatively fought against in the name of reason and forcibly reformed. The result was that instead of renewing the extant stage practice from the inside (in the way Goldoni did later) such debates stood in a polemical and peculiarly static opposition to it. This seems to suggest that these critics, instead of a will to reform merely showed their desire to eliminate working practice dominated by the hated 17th century taste for flowery metaphoric language on the one hand, improbable plots, mixtures of different genres on the other.

As the importance of the literary text declined and practically disappeared in both *Commedia dell'Arte* and opera, regional dialects were more and more used in the former, while spectacular effects and stage machinery became more and more prominent in the latter. Meanwhile, theatre critics rejected the use of dialects, proclaimed tragedy the only respectable form of theatre, and also tried their hand at producing tragedies according to their theoretical principles (the most notable case being Antonio Conti's tragedies Il Cesare - 1726; Lucio Giunio Bruto - 1743; Marco Bruto - 1744; Druso - 1748) either for performance in private aristocratic theatres or for the printed page.⁶

⁴ Quoted by M. Baratto, op.cit., p.21.

⁵ Cfr. G. Guccini ed., op.cit., Introduzione, p.11.

⁶ Cfr. G. Guccini, ed., op.cit., Premessa, p.71:

The source of all theories in the Arcadian rationalist period was of course the revival of Aristotle's Poetics. According to S. Romagnoli⁷ Aristotle was seen alternatively as reinforcing the didactic effectiveness of theatre texts by Muratori, as an experienced connoisseur of theatre whose opinions cannot be ignored by Martello, as the author of a useful handbook on drama-writing by Minghelli, as an indisputably sacred authority by Salio, or as the first scholar in history who derived basic dramatic principles from direct observation of nature, that is to say with an impeccable scientific procedure, by Zanotti.

Such a wide range of opinions from a central core of thought made 18th century Aristotelianism characteristically different from 16th and 17th century Aristotelianism, and at the same time showed its inner weakness. For 18th century theoreticians, Aristotle's Poetics was not a text to be delved into and interpreted word by word with minute philological analysis, but was seen as a set of coercive laws, as in the contemporary French interpretation by Boileau and especially D'Aubignac.

In the attempt to establish Italian theatre as an institution analogous and possibly superior to the French, Italian scholars were influenced by French critical models and viewpoints and this can be considered as yet another cause for the split between theatre theory and theatre practice, in 18th century Italian culture. On the basis of the French system of critical values, Italian theatre was therefore perceived as nothing but a series of deficiencies (lack of professional playwrights, lack of cultivated actors used to poetic

Una cosa, dunque, è sicura: che il più delle volte, per tutto il Settecento in Italia, le tragedie furono messe in scena (quando lo furono) in luoghi privati, cioè nelle sale apposite o nei teatrini dei palazzi signorili, nelle ville durante le villeggiature, nei collegi, nei seminari, nelle accademie per la mancanza di un rapporto continuato di reciproca fiducia, di reciproca intesa e di convenienza tra autori e attori di professione, o, piuttosto, per la tenuità di autentica vena e di esperienza teatrale fra gli scrittori e di impegnata professionalità fra i comici giacchè, come aveva dichiarato il Maffei, "veramente il presente sistema delle loro compagnie, nelle quali il più de' personaggi è occupato dal ridicolo, molto contrasta alla rappresentazione delle tragedie".

⁷ Cfr. S. Romagnoli, "Teatro e recitazione nel Settecento", Orfeo in Arcadia - Studi sul teatro a Roma nel Settecento, a cura di G. Petrocchi, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Firenze, 1984, p.34.

declamation, lack of a cultured audience⁸ capable of appreciating the semantic value of texts).

Although the discussion on theatre took place in cultural centres all over Italy, it was in the Venice and Bologna areas that the subject was discussed in its clearest and most comprehensive terms, thanks to the particularly open-minded attitude of men like Scipione Maffei, Pier Jacopo Martello, Ludovico Antonio Muratori, Giovan Gioseffo Orsi, Pietro Calepio and cultivated actors such as Luigi Riccoboni and his wife Elena Balletti.⁹

Through their lively exchange of ideas, the necessity for a radical renewal of theatre soon emerged, becoming in time a vital part of the reforming movement of the Enlightenment, through which men previously linked to Arcadia tried to rescue Italy from a general condition of moral and political inferiority, well below European standards. The first attempts to reform theatre were important not only from a literary point of view, but also as a sign of the awakening of national feeling in cultural circles, which emerged already at the end of the 17th century as a reaction not only to France's arrogant military power,¹⁰ but also to the invasion of French culture. The difficult bipolar relationship between theory and practice in the Italian theatre was thereby further complicated, and became a sort of triangular play of tensions with the publication of innumerable translations of theatre texts¹¹ from France, an everpresent interlocutor, hated and admired by turns.

⁸ Cfr. in this connection Verri's enthusiastic opinion of French audiences (and his typical Italian prejudice against the Swiss):

E' incredibile con quanta finezza giudichino costoro delle cose di Teatro. Conoscono, analizzano le minime differenze con estrema acutezza. Sono nati e nutriti in ciò. Noi altri siamo, in lor paragone, de'svizzeri.

Quoted by E. Raimondi, "Alfieri 1782: un teatro < <terribile> >", p.389, in G. Guccini, op.cit.

⁹ In connection with the disastrous failure of their experiments in staging Renaissance tragedies in collaboration with Maffei, the Riccobonis emigrated to Paris, where they had to discard all aspirations of a reformed theatre and return to the old formula of Commedia dell'Arte. Luigi later wrote his important *Histoire du Théâtre Italien* (1728), confirming his image as the most cultured Italian actor.

¹⁰ Cfr. Maffei's comment on the French attitude to Italy during the Polish succession war: poor ("misera") Italy, he writes, is disposed of by France "come non ci fossero abitatori, e non fosse abitata che da pecore", quoted by R. Turchi, *La commedia italiana del Settecento*. Sansoni, Firenze, 1985, p.64.

¹¹ Cfr. G. Ortolani, in G. Guccini, op.cit., p.83:

Pietro Calepio is a typical example of the mixed feelings of Italian scholars, half-way between opposition and desire of imitation. In his Paragone della poesia tragica d'Italia con quella di Francia (1732) Calepio shows a peculiar sense of balance, as he rejects the extremely rigid Aristotelianism of the French, and formulates a theory of aesthetic perception mid-way between apprehension through the senses and knowledge through intellect, thus leaving a larger space for creativity to poetic imagination. Calepio's contribution to the dispute on the subject of tragedy was particularly important¹² from the point of view of the age-old problem of the separation between theory and practice. In fact he stressed, even if in a rudimentary way, the crucial point that the real test for a work of theatre, apart from theoretical discussions or text analyses, is the actual stage performance. And this was exactly the point to which Italian theatre authors in general appeared to Calepio to be quite indifferent, thus producing the well-known negative results in the field of tragedy.¹³

Approximately ten years later, in 1744, a Paduan university student, Gianrinaldo Carli (who was later to join the Milanese group of Il Caffè), in his dedication to Apostolo Zeno of his tragedy Ifigenia in Tauri, expressed more radical views than Calepio. He defied the conservative party of the "grecisti", who were "attaccati al gusto delle greche tragedie e al rigorismo dell'arte", and were led by their "illustre capo" (Antonio Conti being the unacknowledged target of his attack); he then made fun of pedantic scholastic rules, through which tragedy became "un ammasso di stravaganze e d'incongruenze"¹⁴ In a public speech entitled "Dell'indole del teatro tragico antico e moderno" (published in 1746), Carli again pleaded for a truly creative conception of tragedy:

¹² It was also important from a theoretical point of view with regard to the problem of the political aims of tragedy. Calepio shared with Maffei and Martello a moderate, classicist line of thought destined to prevail over the other more radical even if still classicist line inherited by Conti from Muratori and Gravina, and oriented towards a more democratic ideological view, further removed from Aristotelian rules. For a detailed discussion on this subject, cfr. M. Ariani, op.cit., pp.130-136.

¹³ Cfr. S. Romagnoli, op.cit., pp.29-30.

¹⁴ Quoted by G. Ortolani, op.cit., p.96.

moderno" (published in 1746), Carli again pleaded for a truly creative conception of tragedy:

I nostri legislatori della poesia teatrale hanno preteso di constringere con inaudita tirannia la nostra sensibilità, ponendo un freno di ferro all'immaginazione ed a quella illusione con cui si possono sorprendere gli animi più insensibili e le menti più stupide, come le più delicate e le più riflessive.¹⁵

While Carli's ideas were generally right, his attack on Conti was the result of a misunderstanding on the part of the young avant-garde rebel. Carli did not see that Conti's adoption of the Aristotelian rules was very cautious, because if he considered them the only guarantee of a rational order in accordance with his empiricist convictions, Conti only accepted them as long as they were not in conflict with common sense. In his unilateral rejection of Aristotelian intellectualism in favour of a purely emotional appeal to the heart's passions, Carli did not understand the complexity of Conti's position.

It was a conception which, on one side, was inspired by the idea of a tragedy on "national" themes (identified in ancient Roman history as the highest moment in the Italian historic past) with a highly didactic political function (in the wake of the Muratori-Gravina doctrine) and on the other side was intensely aware of French and English avant-gardes: Pope and Voltaire, Fénelon and Prior, Addison and Racine's disciples. As a further complication, an important place was held in Conti's conception by the knowledge and appreciation of Shakespeare, even if a Shakespeare manipulated by English 18th century classicist criticism. It is not surprising if, under the burden of such a complex intellectual background, Conti's interest in tragedy was almost obsessive, covering as it did a huge portion of his life: the years from 1726 to 1748, added to the years of his European travels when he studied French and English tragedy.

All aspects of the theatre question were discussed during the century, from the nature of theatre texts and their different forms, to the work of actors, their professional problems, their morality, their relationship to the text, their style of acting, in an attempt to include theatre in a global project of renewal of Italian society. But although

¹⁵ Quoted *ibidem*, p. 98.

this attempt was not successful and the same themes and objects of discussion remained more or less unanswered until the end of the century, when Alfieri inherited them and created his own solution, the important point is that this complex discussion could take place at all. It was in fact a salutary reaction to the all-pervading French influence.

The leader of the anti-French party was Scipione Maffei, in his strong position as the author of the only successful Italian tragedy.¹⁶ Maffei's work as critic and author was constantly directed towards renewing Italian tragedy within a truly national tradition as, for example, when he attempted to revive a group of 16th century Italian works and had them staged by Riccoboni (with the disastrous results already mentioned that marked the permanent 18th century break between private and public theatre, which was only temporarily repaired by Goldoni). Maffei also published those same works and prefaced the volume with an important essay anticipating a quite advanced conception of theatre as a public institution and of a paying audience as the judge of both authors and texts only obeying market forces.¹⁷ In 1752 Maffei published his treatise De' teatri antichi e moderni in which, as a preliminary step to his reforming program he drew the portrait of an ideal actor, and defended the profession from the violent attacks of the Dominican priest Daniele Concina, spokesman of the still widely held reactionary views on theatre (inherited from the 17th century hostile position of the Counter-Reformation), who saw both audience and actors - and especially actresses¹⁸ - as a prey to the devil.

¹⁶ Merope's success had, in Maffei's own words, "in gran parte gettato a terra i francesi con un colpo solo". Quoted by R. Turchi, *op.cit.*, p.65.

¹⁷ Cfr. S. Maffei, Teatro tragico italiano o sia scelta di tragedie per uso della scena. Premessa, Vallarsa, Verona, MDCCXXIII, t.I, p.XXI:

(...) bisogna, che sieno Teatri pubblici, e prezzolati, dove gran moltitudine di gente, e d'ogni condizione concorra, e dove niun rispetto, niuna convenienza, niuna prevenzione, niuna parzialità alteri il giudizio, e trattenga, o spinga i moti naturali d'approvazione o disapprovazione: (...)

¹⁸ Cfr. Concina's fury against "mimas", who are so impudent that "...omnium spectantium oculos et aures excaecant, concupiscentiam accedant, ambitionem fastumque exaltent". Quoted by R. Turchi, La commedia italiana del Settecento Sansoni, Firenze, 1986, p.77.

In the same year 1752, 77-year-old Maffei met the young successful playwright Goldoni in Venice for the first time, and this meeting symbolized a continuity between two generations inspired by the same desire for reform, although so different both in their theoretical views and theatre practice. In these years of transition, Goldoni was aware that the greatest problem of Italian theatre, and most notably of comedy, lay in the fragmentation caused by the different regions, different cultural environments and, as regards spoken language, different dialects. In 1757 in the essay accompanying the second edition of his plays, Goldoni supported a national perspective, even though his plays were firmly rooted in one particular region, when he wrote:

(...) fo sapere agli esteri e ai posteri che i miei libri non sono testi di lingua, ma una raccolta di mie commedie; che io non sono un accademico della Crusca, ma un poeta comico che ha scritto per essere inteso in Toscana, in Lombardia, in Venezia principalmente, e che tutto il mondo può capire quell'italiano stile di cui mi sono servito (...); e che essendo la commedia una imitazione delle persone che parlano, più di quelle che scrivono, mi sono servito del linguaggio più comune rispetto all'universale italiano.¹⁹

But this confident spirit did not last, as concrete difficulties of all kinds induced Goldoni to leave in 1762, and settle down in Paris (where he, the reformer, had to revert to the production of "canovacci" for Commedia dell'Arte by the requests of the French court and audience).

Tragedy found new life-blood in Alfieri's work at the end of the century, but Goldoni's departure caused an irreparable void in the world of comedy²⁰, that was not

¹⁹ Quoted by R. Turchi, *ibidem*, p.84.

²⁰ Cfr. in this connection, Francesco Gritti's almost apocalyptic view of the situation, as he depicted it in his Preface to the translation of Ducis' *Hamlet* (the first *Hamlet* derived from Shakespeare ever to have appeared in Italy):

Finchè gli Attori non conosceranno l'importanza del loro uffizio; finchè non saranno educati per conoscerla e non averanno emolumenti bastanti a decentemente adempirlo; finchè la plebe tumultuosa ed indocile comporrà due terzi dell'uditorio, e applaudirà ad un Attore prima di udirlo aprir bocca; finchè sarà permesso a un'ozioso di sbavigliare ad alta voce nel corso di una Scena che commove e costringe alle lagrime gli spettatori attenti e sensibili, o ad un bello Spirito di sorprendersi che l'*Arlecchino* non sia l'Eroe dell'*Semiramide* o di *Zaira*; finchè i Poeti venali non saranno da Comici ricompensati a dovere, e i liberali rispettati e ubbiditi, e gli uni e gli altri incoraggiati, o non calunniati, e sino a tanto che finalmente l'ingresso allo spettacolo resterà al prezzo vile corrente o non sarà almeno permesso al Poeta di scegliere dalle quattro Truppe Comiche di Venezia i Personaggi a suo giudizio migliori, l'Italia non avrà Teatro Italiano; le Tragedie saranno ridicole, e lagrimevoli le Commedie; la caduta o il successo di una Rappresentazione non ne deciderà del merito: languiranno sul lor nascere i più fervidi ingegni d'Italia, (...) e il nostro Secolo, che per tanti titoli vi ha un'incontrastabil diritto, otterrà le fischiate della Posterità, la quale avrà di più l'avvantaggio di non averlo per spettatore. (Cfr.

filled by the second-rate production of Francesco Albergati Capacelli, Alessandro Pepoli, Giovan Gherardo De' Rossi, Giovanni De Gamerra, and Antonio Simone Sografi. However, the first two in particular deserve to be mentioned for a different reason: Albergati in Bologna and Pepoli in Venice emerged as two of the most famous theatre amateur practitioners.²¹ This aspect of theatre practice, long overlooked by theatre historians and scholars, has now been revalued and is considered an important component in 18th century theatre life (no less than 200 academies throughout Italy in which amateur acting was practised have now been traced) as the context in which most scholars and authors worked (Maffei, Martello, Verri, Monti, Alfieri) and from which the reform of the public theatre eventually originated.

A Voltaire fan all his life, Albergati was probably the most brilliant amateur theatre manager in Italy, and a great popularizer and translator of French tragedies. Towards the end of the century, he was led to the enthusiastic appreciation of bourgeois French drama under the influence of a young Venetian translator, Elisabetta Caminer Turra.²² In close contact with the most up-to-date production in Paris, Caminer published three consecutive collections of plays (1772, 1774, 1794) through which she succeeded in establishing a new popular taste for those excessive, unrealistic plots on the brink of absurdity, in complete opposition to Goldoni's style, that were also attacked by Goldoni's rival Carlo Gozzi. Such a great popular success of the French bourgeois theatre seems to indicate that it was only through this new form that the

Amleto. tragedia di M. Ducis (Ad imitazione della Inglese di Shakespear) - tradotta in verso sciolto - in Venezia MDCCLXXIV - con licenza de' superiori - si vende in Mercerie all'insegna del Cicerone. Prefazione del Traduttore. pp.XII, XIV).

²¹ Cfr. the judgement expressed on amateur actors by the "capocomico" G. Fiorio in the preface to the Trattenimenti Teatrali. presso Domenico Fracasso, Venezia, 1791-94, vol.IV, pp.6-7:

Non nego che fra gli accademici si dieno de' grandi attori. Il nob.sig.co. Alessandro Carli di Verona nel tragico, e nel comico, il nob. Sig. Co. Gaetano Pertusati di Milano nel drammatico, e nel comico il nob.sig. marchese Francesco Albergati, finalmente in ogni genere teatrale e comico e tragico e il nob.sig.co. Alessandro Pepoli illustrarono i teatri accademici di Verona, Milano, Bologna e Venezia non solo colle produzioni, ma coll'esecuzione ancora sorpassando in esattezza, e valore i comici medesimi, anzi fatti si sono modelli di perfezione.

²² They also shared a long-distance love story, through their correspondence on *comédies larmoyantes*, "black" drama, bourgeois drama, that faded away at first sight on their first meeting in Venice.

impasse of Italian comic theatre due to Goldoni's departure and the hegemony of opera, could be overcome.

Alessandro Pepoli, amateur actor, author and critic of a younger generation than Albergati, was a minor but interesting figure in the Venetian theatre world. An anti-conformist, rebellious character and a declared enemy of Alfieri's, he deserves a mention in the history of Shakespeare's reception in Italy as he explicitly acknowledged his debt to Shakespeare. In the Avvertimenti ai lettori prefacing his tragedy Don Carlo (1787-1788) he declared that he had been inspired by the "teatro inglese, insuperabile nel genere terribile" and by "il dio della scena inglese, il gran Shakespeare"²³ In actual fact, Pepoli's attempts at "terribile" effects were only the unsuccessful expression of his rather crude taste for the horrific. In his enthusiasm as a reformer, Pepoli also elaborated a theory of "fisedia", or "canto di natura" under Shakespeare's influence, in which he advocated a mixture of tragic and comic elements, and called for freedom from the Aristotelian unities of time and place. Even if no practical results were obtained by Pepoli's ideas, he certainly anticipated themes and interests which were to be central in the future discussion on tragedy as a genre in the Romantic period, (starting with the neoclassic generation of Monti, Foscolo, Pindemonte and Alfieri), when the writing of tragedies and historical drama reached its peak during the Risorgimento.

Another minor author of the same period, Giovanni De Gamerra, also declared his indebtedness to Shakespeare (as well as to Lope de Vega and Voltaire) in the writing of his "tragedia domestica pantomima" La madre colpevole, as follows:

Il popolo che vede con piacere i sotterratori maneggiar le ossa dei morti, a barzellettare su i sepolcri, che ammira le nobili azioni e sorprendenti scene di Hamlet, della Morte di Cesare, di Giulietta, ecc., questo popolo definisce egli proprio gusto e il proprio carattere. Egli vuole ad ogni costo quadri energici.

²³ Cfr. A. Pepoli, Avvertimenti ai lettori premessi a La gelosia snaturata o sia la morte di D. Carlo infante di Spagna in Teatro. Palese, Venezia, 1787-1788, vol.I, p.2.

²⁴ Cfr. G. De Gamerra, Prefazione a La madre colpevole. in Novo teatro. Prosperi, Pisa 1789, Vol.II, pp.8-9.

In this way De Gamerra justified his own preference, supposedly inspired by Shakespeare and Voltaire, for rough and gloomy subjects abounding in murders, parricides, treasons, and incest, as an attempt to satisfy the expectations of his audience.²⁵

In accordance with his position of constant isolation in the Italian literary world, Alessandro Verri requires a separate place of consideration in the context of the theatre question in 18th century Italy.

First of all, he is to be placed in a larger European perspective, as his warm admiration for Shakespeare and intense study of his works over the years 1768-1777, put him in perfect consonance with the contemporary attitude prevailing in Europe and especially in the German literary world, where Shakespeare had come to be identified as the major exponent of a "mondo poetico dominato dal libero sfogo dell'individualità e dalle passioni"²⁶ Verri's inclination for Shakespeare can probably be traced back to his stay in London between 1766 and 1767, at a time when interest for Shakespeare was growing increasingly more keen especially owing to Garrick's work (to which Alessandro explicitly was to refer in the "Prefazione" to his own Tentativi Drammatici, which was published in Livorno in 1779), to Johnson's Preface (1765), and to Lady Montagu's Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare (1769). At the same time

²⁵ For a lucid interpretation of De Gamerra's attitude, cfr. R. Turchi, ed. "La commedia del Settecento", introduzione al Tomo Primo, Il Teatro italiano. Einaudi, Torino, 1987, p. XXI:

Shakespeare e Voltaire venivano qui ridotti ad autori validi pressoché esclusivamente per gli effetti d'orrore e di sorpresa presenti nei loro drammi e al De Gamerra sfuggiva del tutto il rapporto che quelle azioni o quegli episodi da lui citati avevano col tessuto complessivo dell'opera drammatica. I teschi esumati dai becchini nell'Amleto o i veleni di Giulietta e Romeo egli presumeva di poterli trasportare sulla scena a gara con i suoi grandi predecessori confidando sulla capacità autonoma di suggestione che quegli oggetti di morte potevano esercitare su un pubblico distratto e ingenuo e però in continua attesa di effetti macabri e orridi.

²⁶ Cfr. G. Weise, L'ideale eroico del Rinascimento - Diffusione europea e tramonto, Vol. II, Napoli 1965, p. 366. Quoted by M. Cerruti, Neoclassici e giacobini, Silva Editore, Milano, 1969. Several contemporary reference points are also listed by Cerruti on p. 54: young Goethe's expressions of enthusiasm in Zum Shakespearetag - 1772; Johann Gottfried Herder's Shakespeare - 1773; Anmerkungen ubres Theater by Lenz - 1774. These were elements in a movement which was to culminate in Baretti's Discours, while in Italy in 1775, as we learn from his autobiography (La vita scritta da esso) Alfieri interrupted his reading of the French translations of Shakespeare's works for fear of being too influenced by them in his own writing.

Alessandro was probably also rethinking Voltaire's progressively negative evaluation²⁷ of Shakespeare's works as a savage, uncultured exhibition of energy (though at times blindingly beautiful) and re-elaborating it in his own terms of an intensely pre-Romantic appreciation for typical 17th century style both in Italy and England.²⁸ Verri's Shakespearian itinerary started at first with the attempt at translating Hamlet in 1768, was then interrupted for a period during which he wholeheartedly dedicated himself to the study of Greek and the prose translation of the Iliad (which actually answered the same need to assimilate, in order to later reproduce them creatively, authentically primitive and barbaric literary elements).

Verri resumed his work on Hamlet, completing it between 1776 and 1777 and subsequently translated Othello. Verri's choice of working on these particular plays stemmed directly from his interest in barbaric primitivism, as they are especially centred on the most irrational components of moral experience, and on excessive, monstrous passions that can only be explained through the hypothesis of something "marvellous" (in Hume's²⁹ sense) and abnormal, something atrociously unpleasant inherent in human nature.

At the end of the work on Hamlet and Othello, Verri's enthusiasm for Shakespeare which had been steadily growing, was finally converted into concrete form when he wrote his "Tentativi": Pantea and La congiura di Milano, between 1777 and 1778 (to be followed, between 1777 and 1780 by the novel Avventure di Saffo, developed along the same thematic lines but also under the influence of Sterne's Tristram Shandy³⁰). His position, in those years, was clearly in agreement with the contemporary Anglo-German cultural line of thought (previously expressed in Lessing's

²⁷ Cfr. Verri's 1769 letter quoted *infra*, p.142, footnote 16.

²⁸ Cfr. Verri's 1777 letter quoted *infra*, p.151, footnote 38.

²⁹ For a detailed study of the impact of Hume's thought on the research carried on by Verri into the themes of irrationalism and primitivism (exemplified in his opinion by Shakespeare's and Homer's poetry), cfr. M. Cerruti, *op.cit.*, pp.31-35, 38-39, 41-42, 44, 47, 57, 80, 94.

³⁰ For a reference to Sterne's influence on Verri, cfr. M. Cerruti, *op.cit.*, p.59.

Hamburgische Dramaturgie - 1767-1769), according to which Goethe wrote his Goetz von Berlichingen and the first version of Egmont, and which saw Shakespeare as a prodigious source of creative energy.

Along with his Greek and Shakespearian studies, a third component is to be reckoned with in Verri's work of background research for the writing of his tragedies. In his unpublished Storia d'Italia written in the 1760s, he had carried on a prolonged meditation on various Italian theatre authors (Maffei, Trissino, Lazzarino, Baruffaldi, Zeno, Metastasio) and he had come to the conclusion that they were all inferior to Goldoni, in his opinion: "il primo e l'unico grande uomo d'Italia in questo genere".³¹ Alessandro was encouraged by his studies on Italian theatre to embark on his project of dramatic writing as a "carriera dove l'Italia non dà modelli che tolgono il coraggio"³², as he wrote in April 1778, when he sent a copy of Pantea to Pietro. He was also stimulated by the fact, as he wrote shortly afterwards in connection with La congiura di Milano, that he was tackling a new dramatic genre for Italy, in which "il soggetto non è del tragico eroico, ma piuttosto ha del dramma, ed è di mezzo fra la tragedia eroica e la domestica".³³

Last but not least, Alessandro's interest in theatre went beyond purely literary appreciation and was centred on the concrete components of stage performance, even as a personal life experience.³⁴

³¹ Quoted by E. Greppi, "Un'opera inedita di A. Verri sulla Storia d'Italia", Archivio Storico Lombardo, XXXII (1905), s.IV, vol.III, p.133.

³² Quoted by M. Cerruti, op.cit., p.60.

³³ Quoted ibidem pp.60-61.

³⁴ His active participation in amateur theatre performances is revealed in the following passage; quoted ibidem, p.61:

Venendo il carnevale (...) nella più gran stanza di casa si costruì un beninteso teatro, di forma semicircolare con due porte laterali all'uso de' Greci (...) si scelsero le rappresentanze e furono *L'indigente* di Monsieur Mercier e la *Zenobia* di Crébillon tradotta dal Frugoni. (...) Nella *Zenobia* la Marchesa faceva da Zenobia, io da Radamisto. (...) Io ero vestito all'antica romana, precisamente come le statue de' Cesari e coll'elmo esattamente antico, le mie positure ed ogni atto pure era regolato dai moti della pittura ed ho sempre procurato di compormi anche nelle più violente passioni sulla scorta de' buoni pittori, di modo che fossi da dipingere ad ogni atto, e su di questo i migliori artisti di Roma hanno ritrovato che aveva ottenuto il mio intento.

In his preface to "Tentativi", Verri firmly attacked the lack of a close link between theory and practice in Italian theatre and his polemical attitude expressed a deep-felt commitment to the task of making Italian theatrical culture less provincial and more open to contemporary European experimental perspectives.³⁵ The genesis of Pantea is described by Verri in a letter to his brother as follows³⁶:

I miei, posso dire, lunghi studi sulla Iliade e su Shakespeare, che sono due meravigliosi modelli e fonti perenni d'ogni poesia e nutrimento dell'immaginazione, mi davano un certo prurito; ho letto molto di teatrale in questi ultimi mesi; finalmente ricercai nelle mie carte sugli autori greci, e ritrovai il soggetto che ho fatto. Incominciai a scrivere senza sapere che mi facessi; a poco a poco il soggetto mi riscaldò: mi parve di sentirlo: azzardai ad esprimermi, e feci un'informe tragedia di quattro atti, i primi due in prosa, i secondi in versi, senza averne detto parola ad alcuno.

Pantea (based on Xenophon's Cyropedia) and La congiura di Milano (account of a failed revolutionary project, based on Machiavelli and Corio, but strongly inspired by Shakespeare's Julius Caesar) belong to the same line of research as the subsequent novel Avventure di Saffo and form together a sort of work in progress springing from a new, disquieting sensibility, directed towards exploring the irrational elements of moral experience. In both his "Tentativi", Verri anticipated the theme (a human experience overwhelmed by uncontrollable external circumstances and at the same time by unrestrained passion), which he was to develop more fully in the novel.

³⁵ The initial part of the "Prefazione" read as follows:

Chiamo tentativi queste due composizioni drammatiche, perché le presento al pubblico prima di averne fatta esperienza su i teatri. In Francia, e in Inghilterra un Autore non istampa che quando la sua opera sia approvata sulle Scene, considerandosi quelle come l'Areopago in tal materia. Io pure ben volentieri comparirei a questo Tribunale, stimando che qualunque dramma non regge alla rappresentazione, sia essenzialmente difettoso, benché lo ricolmassero di lodi i Letterati o gli Amici. Ma perché questa esperienza sia decisiva, non deve mancare di due condizioni; l'una è che gli Attori sieno eccellenti, l'altra che gli Spettatori sieno avvezzi alle perfette rappresentazioni. In Londra o in Parigi, specialmente pochi anni sono, quand'erano sul teatro un Garik, e un Lekain, con un pubblico che ha quasi a memoria gli squarci più sublimi d'Autori immortali, dove un Peruchiere ha gustato mille volte il trasporto e la maestà di Shakespeare, e di Cornelio, il giudizio delle Scene è inappellabile. Ma in Italia sarebbe incerto e pericoloso, perché ancora non abbiamo attori in Europa, ed il pubblico non ha ancora dimenticate le facezie d'Arlecchino e di Pulcinella. Adunque il più sicuro giudizio a cui ricorrere è quello de' Lettori, perché quand'essi ritrovassero nell'autore quella energia che scuote, ne verrebbe col tempo in conseguenza che il favorevole suffragio loro spingesse anco la composizione Drammatica sulle Scene.

(Quoted *ibidem*, p.62)

³⁶ Letter dated "Roma, 18 aprile 1778, Carteggio di P. e A. Verri, Vol IX, a c. di G. Seregni, A. Milesi e figli, Milano, 1937, p.265.

Despite the analogy of their inspiration, the reception of the three works was quite different. While the two tragedies were not too successful, owing also to their experimental nature and close affinity with their Greek and Shakespearian models, the novel was very warmly welcomed.³⁷

A judgement attributed to the progressive critic Gianrinaldo Carli, (who had in previous years joined the Il Caffè group) by Pietro in a letter to Alessandro, summarized the nature of Pantea in the following terms: "pezzo originale e sublime, che ha la tinta di antico greco colla feroce libertà inglese"³⁸. Not many other critics in Italy, though, were able to understand the novelties introduced by Verri's experimental theatre: the new taste to which they were inspired could only be fully appreciated after the advent of the Romantic movement.

In the meantime, as the century drew to a close, the long and tormented debate on tragedy finally found a unifying objective: unanimous admiration for the achievement of Alfieri.

³⁷ Cfr. Pietro's letter, dated 2.1.1782 in Carteggio, op.cit., Vol.XII, a c. di G. Seregni, Giuffré, Milano, 1942 pp.152-153: "La tua Saffo incontra prodigiosamente e il libro se lo rubano l'un l'altro, tanto è l'entusiasmo col quale se ne parla."

³⁸ Cfr. Carteggio, op.cit., Vol.IX, p.265.

The Era of Translations

One of the most significant aspects of the 18th century literary background in Italy was the extraordinary popularity of translations from English and, to a lesser extent, from German literary works,¹ which can be interpreted as a symptom of the widespread need to get in touch with the new culture of the European Enlightenment. The vogue for translations was part of a general movement of renewal of Italian culture which made its first appearance in scientific and philosophical fields, and which was the expression of a general enthusiasm for research and curiosity for all that was new and different. The same mental attitude drove abroad men of letters who were dissatisfied and tired with the perpetuation of classicism in Italy, even in the new Arcadian forms, which had soon degenerated into pseudo-classicism.

As mentioned before,² from the second decade of the century men like Maffei, Conti, Rolli and Algarotti had already begun their cosmopolitan pilgrimages which were to have far-reaching results in the second half of the century, when a flood of translations from Northern European literatures invaded Italy (Milan and Venice in particular). These early precursors were engaged in translating their favourite English authors, and being personally in touch with the English cultural world, they were able to translate from English texts directly, without relying on French mediation, as most other Italian translators had to do. As A. Graf³ maintains:

(...) le traduzioni italiane erano, nove volte su dieci, traduzioni di traduzioni francesi. Possiamo immaginare facilmente come ne rimanessero conciatissimi gli originali e che scritture eleganti venissero ad accrescere il tesoro delle patrie lettere.

Conti and Rolli, in particular, were the authors of very successful translations: among other things, Conti translated The Rape of the Lock (Il riccio rapito) making a great contribution

¹ It is to be noticed that the dominant trend until then had been in the opposite direction, from Italian into other European languages, as Italy had gone on exporting its rich Renaissance culture well into the 17th century.

² Cfr. supra pp.15, "The Italian 18th Century Cultural Background".

³ Cfr. A. Graf., L'Anglomania e l'influsso inglese in Italia nel secolo XVIII. Torino, Loescher, 1911, p.242.

to the popularity of Pope,⁴ and Rolli tackled the formidable task of translating Paradise Lost.

Conti's translation showed an extraordinarily deep poetic consonance between author and translator, despite the fact that, as Conti explicitly declared in the preface to the first 1724 edition written in Paris (and published in 1751 in London), he was "molto discostato dalle leggi rigorose della traduzione". Actually, Conti was not really interested in translation theory and never participated in the great debate on translation which accompanied the spread of translation as a side activity for nearly all Italian men of letters throughout the century. According to A. Graf: "tradurre qualcosa dall'inglese, specie poesia, divenne quasi obbligo per chiunque nel nostro paese si fregiasse del nome di "letterato". E sarebbe facile qui fare sfilare una processione, che comincerebbe col Conti e col Rolli, e potrebbe finire col Foscolo".⁵

Unlike his colleagues, Conti did not normally indulge in long theoretical discussions, nor state any guiding general principles or justifications for his translation choices.⁶ The translator in him was wholly identified with the cultural mediator, the scholar and the critic, so that the first impulse towards translation was always dictated by a critical interest in the original author, and translation became a means for him of clarifying

⁴ Cfr. G. Gronda, "Tradizione e innovazione: le versioni poetiche di Antonio Conti", Giornale storico della letteratura italiana, Torino 1970, pp.304-305:

Nell'ambiente poetico dominato dalla musicalità metastasiana e dal fragile classicismo arcadico, le traduzioni dal poeta inglese introdussero, è noto, un modello di poesia diversa, testimoniarono un rapporto tra società e letteratura più diretto e più concreto di quanto si avesse esperienza in quegli anni in Italia.

⁵ Cfr. A. Graf, op.cit., p.244.

⁶ Cfr. G. Gronda, op.cit., pp.352-353:

(...) l'interesse per il tradurre e la consapevolezza dei problemi - fedeltà, libertà, genio dell'autore, genio della lingua e della nazione - che travagliano i traduttori contemporanei sembrano esaurirsi nell'esasperata coscienza critica che spinge il Conti a dichiararsi sempre insoddisfatto del proprio lavoro e a ritornarvi sopra a distanza di anni. Egli non ignora la discussione già viva ai suoi tempi e destinata a continuare per tutto il secolo coinvolgendo fondamentali questioni critiche e storiche, ma l'eco dei dibattiti così vivaci negli Avvertimenti degli altri traduttori giunge attenuato nelle sue brevi lettere prefatorie.

Cfr. also, for a complementary study on Conti as translator by the same author, the "Nota critica" contained in Antonio Conti Versioni poetiche, a cura di G. Gronda, Laterza, Bari, 1966.

the critical problems involved, while relying on his poetic instinct as the only guide in the technical task of translation.

Besides Pope, Milton, the most feared English author in Italy on account of his anti-Catholic position, also aroused Conti's particular interest (probably because of Conti's hardly dissimulated bent for free-thinking). Conti even started a translation of Paradise Lost, but soon gave it up in view of the fact that Rolli had earlier started his own translation and was already quite advanced in it. Their respective styles as translators can be compared in their translation of Racine's Athalie.⁷ Conti, for whom Athalie was an ideal model of tragedy, felt awed by the task, and was conscious of performing a useful stylistic exercise which could positively influence the writing of his own tragedies. Probably also conditioned by this approach, Conti produced a translation which was so austere and solemn as to become monotonous, while Rolli, giving free rein to his theatrical instinct and being well trained in the production of libretti for opera, wrote a much livelier translation.

Rolli's monumental achievement, the translation of Paradise Lost, took him almost twenty years of continuous work, starting in 1717. The first part was published in 1728 and the second part in 1730 in London. Both editions were prefaced by a brief but complete biography of the poet (Vita di Giovanni Milton), with observations on the origins of Milton's poetry and on the problems of translating Paradise Lost. This important topic (as well as unfavourable criticism about a recent French translation of Paradise Lost) was discussed as follows:⁸

⁷ Cfr. G. Gronda, "Tradizione e innovazione", op.cit., pp.334-337.

⁸ Cfr. Del Paradiso Perduto, poema inglese di Giovanni Milton - Libri sei - parte prima, tradotti da Paolo Rolli, compagno della Reale Società in Londra - L'Acclamato nell'Accademia degli Intronati in Siena, Accademico Quirino e Pastore Arcade in Roma. Londra, presso Samuel Aris, MDCCXXIX - Vita di Giovanni Milton.

It is interesting to note that the title of "Pastore Arcade", so proudly included in the frontispiece of the book has been exactly what in the following centuries has damaged Rolli's literary reputation. Italian literary histories have tended for a long time to dismiss him as a "letteratuzzo" not worthy of any notice, "trasferitosi in paese straniero, per tenere ora allegre ora meste le dame londinesi" who, "in un impeto di eroicomico burbanza" had "posato la zampogna per porre la lancia in resta contro il poderoso avversario", that is to say against Voltaire. (Cfr. S. Fassini, "Paolo Rolli contro il Voltaire", Giornale Storico della letteratura italiana, Loescher, Torino, 1907, pp.83-99.

In questo anno n'è stata impressa a Parigi in tre volumetti in 12^o una Traduzione⁹ in prosa, dicesi, di un tal Saint Maure, con la Vita dell'Autore, e con gli Spettatori suddetti, preceduti al Poema. Saria stato desiderabile che il Traduttore avesse meglio inteso l'Originale, e n'avesse, o avesse potuto seguirne più d'appresso la Traccia: Questa italiana litterale Traduzione ne mostrerà evidentemente sì gli Abbagli, che le Mancanze, e potrebbe essere di non poco aiuto al per altro lodevole Traduttore il quale à l'Opra sua di non poche e molto convenevoli annotazioni adornato. Di questa mia Traduzione io penso ch'ella sia la più esatta Metafrasi che siasi mai letta, e ciò per l'estrema correlazione della Sintassi nelle due Lingue e particolarmente nello Stil Miltoniano: e siccome io pretendo di non aver solo literalmente tradotto i sensi di MILTON ma pur anche la Poesia; così dico non esser nell'Opra mia parte alcuna ch'io voglia scusare come deficiente di Sublimità e poetica Bellezza; per aver voluto essere Tradutor litterale. No non basta per ben tradurre tali opere: spiegarne il senso in altre lingue. Tutte le più trasportatrici Bellezze che in delicati e talor minutissimi Tratti scintillano, tutte allora si perdono: poiché lo Scheletro solo, e non il bellissimo Corpo nelle sue intiere Fattezze e negli Ornamenti della Vaghiissima Veste, allor se ne mostra. Vedranno i Lettori che quasi d'un terzo il numero dei versi miei è maggiore di quelli di MILTON, ma sappiano che la lingua Inglese è copiosissima di Monosillabi e di parole bisillabe talmente che bene spesso dieci et undici parole e più, contandovi le collise, son contenute in un verso: onde considerando essi all'incontro, che ne' versi nostri le parole sono commentate sei, e di rado son più di sette o di otto: ne conosceranno la meccanica necessità del numero maggiore suddetto.

Rolli's work was followed with great interest and eager expectation of the Italian edition by progressive literary groups in Italy.¹⁰ Finally, the first edition of the first six books of Paradise Lost was published in Verona in 1730¹¹ and was dedicated to Scipione Maffei "il più benemerito Letterato d'Italia".

⁹ Current 18th century use of double "z" in words derived from Latin where "t" was preceded by an assimilable consonant.

¹⁰ Muratori himself took particular interest in this project: as early as 1726 he had written to Riva: "Certo che sempre più cresce in me l'ansietà di leggere la traduzione del Paradiso fatta dal nostro valoroso Sig. Rolli. Egli si cattiverà molto gli inglesi, ma non meno gl'italiani." Two years later, again writing to Riva, Muratori mentioned another work-in-progress by Rolli (previously published in London with the title Remarks upon M. Voltaire's Essay on the Epick Poetry of the European Nations, by Paul Rolli, London, printed and sold by Tho. Edlin (...) 1728 and in French in Paris under the title Examen de l'Essai de M. de Voltaire sur la Poësie Epique, par M. Paul Rolli Traduit de l'Anglois par M.L.A. à Paris chez Rollin fils (...) MDCCXXVIII, with a preface of the translator abbé Antonini who wished the pamphlet would stop in France "Les idées désavantageuses que M. de Voltaire y pourroit inspirer de nos auteurs, comme M. Rolli les a prévenues en Angleterre." The remarks on Voltaire's essay on epic poetry (1727) which were to be included in the Italian volume of the translation of Paradise Lost (in answer to the analysis Voltaire had made of Italian authors like Trissino, Tasso, Ariosto, etc. and to Voltaire's thesis of the superiority of the French language over the Italian one, Rolli had decided to engage in a battle against Voltaire on behalf of Italy's hurt literary honour) were expected with no less impatience than the Paradiso by Muratori and his group: "Animo a nostro signor Rolli a dar fuori l'Apologia Italica contro le insolenze del Voltaire. Ma e quando ci ha egli a condurre al suo Paradiso? L'una e l'altra opera è da me sommamente desiderata per onore dell'Italia". From far-off Vienna another of Riva's illustrious correspondents, Metastasio, also pined for Rolli's translation: "Questo benedetto Paradiso del Rolli è il nostro purgatorio. Sempre viene e non giunge mai. Credo ch'egli conti le settimane all'uso di Daniele." (Daniele's week equalled seven years). For all the above quotations Cfr. G.E. Dorris, op.cit., pp.150-151.

¹¹ Rolli, Il Paradiso Perduto, poema inglese del Signor Milton tradotto in nostra lingua al quale si premettono Osservazioni sopra il Libro del Signor Voltaire che esamina l'Epica Poesia delle Nazioni

In the context of the great debate on translation¹² in the second half of the century, a special place can be accorded to Alessandro Verri, the first Italian translator of Hamlet. Verri's position was one of great modesty, of painstaking effort to penetrate and reproduce the meaning of the text in a most conscientious way. Consequently the question of literality was of paramount importance to him, being closely linked with his desire to convey as much as possible of the foreign language and the foreign author. His views on translation were influenced by the rationalist ideas of the Encyclopédie, so that, paradoxically, he found theoretical justification for his ideas in France while he strongly disapproved of French translations.¹³ In his conception of language Verri went through the same involutionary process as in his political ideas. The strongly anti-Cruscan, anti-pedantic position of his youth¹⁴ was practically denied (in this connection he wrote to Pietro: "cancellerei la maggior parte di quanto ho stampato"¹⁵) in the later conservative phase of

Europee, scritte originalmente in inglese, e in Londra stampate nel 1728, poi 1730. (The entire translation was reprinted in Paris (1740) and both in Paris and Verona in 1742.)

¹² A discussion on this subject can be found in M. Denes, A Study of Translation Theories in 18th Century Italy and their relevance to the Questione della Lingua, March 1983, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, University of Warwick. The author's viewpoint is that 18th century Italian scholars and theorists of translation can be seen as the precursors of many 20th century ideas on translation. Various aspects of the translation question are dealt with, such as insistence on the importance of translation as a means of language enrichment and at the same time as a contribution to and verification of new philosophical ideas on language (Algarotti, Cesarotti), but also as a source of better knowledge both of the native and the foreign language, with a significant shift towards the concrete study of languages (indicated by Cassirer as a remarkable 18th century tendency).

Other aspects discussed by Denes are the awareness of links between language and social environment, the new concept of "genio della lingua" (used for the first time in Italy by Algarotti in a more historicist sense, as he borrowed it from Locke's philosophy), the responsibility of the translator vis-à-vis the original text (cfr. the 20th century view of the translator as literary critic).

¹³ In particular Verri was very dissatisfied with the only Shakespearian translations available in France, those by La Place, as they were aimed at a very free re-elaboration of the plots, rather than at reproducing the substance of the linguistic feature of Shakespeare's texts, as Verri himself constantly tried to do.

¹⁴ Alessandro's most loudly rebellious attack appeared in Il Caffè under the title "Rinunzia avanti notaio degli autori del presente foglio periodico al Vocabolario della Crusca" (t.I, f.IV). In this manifesto against Cruscan principles, methods and theories and in favour of the most libertarian use of language, legitimizing the introduction of "forestierismi", Alessandro wrote:

(...) se italianizzando le parole Francesi, Tedesche, Inglesi, Turchi, Greche, arabe, Scilavone, noi potremmo rendere meglio le nostre idee, non ci asterremo di farlo. (...) Consideriamo ch'ella è cosa ragionevole, che le parole servano alle idee, non le idee alle parole, onde noi vogliamo prendere il buono quand'anche fosse ai confini dell'Universo.

¹⁵ Cfr. Carteggio di P. e A. Verri, a c. di E. Greppi, A. Giuliani, F. Novati, G. Seregni, Milano, 1923-42, I, p.23, parte II, p.127.

his life, but what he never dismissed was his strong belief in semantic accuracy, which was also his basic criterion in his translation practice. As he believed so much in the importance of conveying a well-defined meaning and precise connotation for each word, there was no possible dichotomy between fidelity and infidelity: a word-for-word transposition was for him the unavoidable preliminary stage for any translation, without which no accurate (i.e. true) translation could be achieved.

The contrast between Verri's intransigent ideas on translation in general and Shakespearian translation in particular, and the normal practice of translation popularly adopted in Italy at the time, can be seen in the diverse fates of Verri's translation of Hamlet and Gritti's translation of Ducis' adaptation. Verri's starting point was the complete English play, meticulously translated word by word (even though subsequently re-elaborated). For personal reasons, this first authentic version of the English text never reached the Italian reading public nor a stage audience. In contrast, the first Amleto staged in Italy was not only not translated from the original English text, but was a translation of the already disfigured French adaptation by Ducis, further modified by Gritti in accordance with his personal taste. The result of this double manipulation was immensely successful,¹⁶ as it was perfectly in line with the expectations of the Italian public. Quite probably, Verri's attempt at an honest transposition of the English play would have been met only by horrified incomprehension.

The case of Hamlet clearly exemplifies both Italy's outstanding cultural debt towards France in the field of translation, and the impossibility for Northern European literary works to be assimilated without undergoing a process of modification. The first

¹⁶ In this connection, cfr. R. Ceserani, Raccontare la letteratura, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 1990, p.131, who sees this success as an example of the transforming force of the two new literary modes (sentimental-pathetic and parodic-ironical) through which 18th century theatrical genres were modified:

(...) il modo ironico-parodico aiutò (...) a dar forma a intermezzi, commedie di costume, fiabe filosofiche, ecc.; il modo patetico-sentimentale contribuì a trasformare le tragedie lungo due diverse tendenze: verso il melodramma, con semplificazione delle vicende, accentuazione degli elementi patetici e impiego del linguaggio musicale, e verso il dramma borghese. Fu questa ultima la linea seguita da Diderot e in una certa misura anche da Goldoni; ed è la linea esemplificata clamorosamente dal rifacimento fortunatissimo dell'Amleto di Shakespeare compiuto in Francia da Jean-François Ducis nel 1769, con l'accento posto sulle virtù familiari e domestiche e sull'espressione patetica dei sentimenti e con la scelta dello happy ending.

stage of this process in Italy was characterized by a sense of bewilderment and confusion, quite different from the much smoother way in which the same phenomenon had earlier taken place in France, thanks especially to Letourneur.¹⁷ The stock of new ideas and attitudes introduced into Italian literature through translation was bound to produce conflicts on many different planes: sensibility, taste, literary style, general outlook, religious conscience. It is not surprising, therefore, that Shakespeare should be spoken of as a "barbarian".

The French scholar Paul Hazard¹⁸ has listed different procedures through which the slow process of adaptation took place,¹⁹ by distinguishing areas of conflict and various ways in which the conflicts came to be eased. According to Hazard the areas of conflict were of a different nature: they could be external objective obstacles to free artistic expression (political and religious censorship, authoritarian conservative attitudes in the literary establishment, conditioned by the famous "questione della lingua" under the dictatorship of the Accademia della Crusca's lexical principles) and they could be subjective elements linked with the Italian cultural heritage (deeply ingrained classicism, Aristotelian dogmatism producing intellectual and emotional limitations). In Hazard's opinion, the compromise was reached in some cases, such as for example the Protestant/Catholic conflict, through a partly unconscious filter which worked by tacitly ignoring the most

¹⁷ In this connection, cfr. W. Binni, Preromanticismo italiano, Laterza, Bari, 1974 pp.128-129 who sees in Letourneur:

una scaltrezza veramente eccezionale nel mediare, nell'introdurre a piccole dosi e coerentemente, senza scosse ed urti eccessivi, i nuovi motivi poetici, accentuando sempre più la tendenza sentimentale insita a suo modo nella prosa romanzesca francese (influenzata a sua volta dai romanzi inglesi alla Richardson).

An example of Letourneur's ability for a smooth transposition from English into French is his translation of Young's *Night Thoughts*, commented upon by Letourneur himself as follows:

Mon intention a été de tirer de l'Young anglais un Young français qui pût plaire à ma nation et qu'on pût lire avec intérêt sans songer s'il est original ou copie.

However, this smoothness cost a high price, because it meant the suppression of Young's lyricism considered by Letourneur "des superfluités basses triviales, mauvaises", as well as of all allusions to Protestantism in favour of a more universal conception of religion.

¹⁸Cfr. P. Hazard, "L'invasion des littératures du Nord dans l'Italie du XVIIIème siècle". Revue de Littérature Comparée, I, 1921, pp.30-67.

¹⁹ Cfr. *ibidem*, p.39: "Ici va commencer un travail de déformation, dont les procédés seront multiples, entre les Barbares et les gardiens de la cité, une manière d'accommodement."

stubborn differences: Protestant authors could be made acceptable by simply suppressing the most disturbing passages, while in the case of a Catholic author like Pope who, however, often dangerously verged on heresy, could be justified either in view of the fundamental purity of his intentions or in view of his tendency as an artist to overemphasize his ideas.

Another typical tendency to be found in Italian translations was, according to Hazard,²⁰ the passage from the unknown to the well-known. Since classical antiquity was still the most prestigious of all known cultures, Italian translators tended to try and show the similarities between Northern European literary works and Greek and Roman masterpieces. A case in point was Aurelio de' Giorgi Bertola's²¹ treatment of Gessner, seen as a modern mixture of Theocritus and Virgil, but in the case of Goethe, the absolute impossibility of reducing him to a classical model drove Bertola to this passionate declaration:

Quelle gloire M Goethe n'acquerrait-il pas (...) s'il voulait se persuader un jour que les irrégularités ne peuvent tromper que pour un temps; que Shakespeare, l'idole de sa nation, n'a pour lui que bien peu de scènes dans tout le reste de l'Europe; que celui-là court grand risque de perdre de vue la nature, qui perd de vue les divins modèles des Grecs; car c'est à ceux-ci, exclusivement, que Racine et Maffei doivent d'être beaux pour tous les temps et pour toutes les nations (...).²²

Hazard²³ also lists as one of the most popular procedures the "improvement" of Northern European works, which in the eyes of Italian translators lacked art, that is to say order, reasonableness, observance of the rules and so on. In the context of these ideas, it is quite understandable that Shakespeare's tragedies could not be tolerated without changing their subversive and anarchic nature and forcing them into a classical mould. Those authors who were relatively faithful to the rules and to good taste, who were not too bold, showing more balance and common sense than others, became great favourites with

²⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, p.42.

²¹ The Italian scholar and translator, considered as the apostle of German studies in 18th century Italy.

²² Quoted by P. Hazard, *op.cit.*, p.44.

²³ Cfr. *ibidem*.

Italian translators. Hazard indicates Pope and Addison as the most translated English authors because they had exactly the pre-requisites which were deemed necessary. Other authors, considered to be not so well balanced and reasonable as Pope and Addison, had to undergo the "improvement" procedure through which their supposed faults were to be adjusted. Moreover, most translations were modelled on the French translations from English, and these had already been profoundly altered. An exemplary case of the progressive degradation which English texts incurred in the passage from French to Italian translations is Young, whose poetry was considered too obscure and unbalanced. Italian translators simply adopted the already disfigured translation by Letourneur,²⁴ further mitigating in their turn all that was strange or disturbing for Italian taste.

The slow process of familiarization with such a new kind of poetic imagination went on with the appearance of more and more "notti", "tombe", "canti barditi", "idilli melanconici", until the peak of popularity was reached by the most famous translation of all, the Ossian poems translated in 1763 by Melchiorre Cesarotti. Apart from its decisive formative influence in the transformation of popular taste, this translation could also be considered as the central feature of the wide debate on translation developing throughout the century.

Cesarotti had been participating in the debate holding a position which could be considered as the polar opposite to that of Verri: he had believed in a double standard in poetic translation presuming a difference of aims between a literal prose translation for the reader's instruction and a non-literal poetic one for his entertainment, and he had supported this position by writing a double translation of the *Iliad*. When tackling the translation of the Ossian poems, Cesarotti adopted a middle-way position, by opposing both those who were in favour of the most scrupulous exactitude and those who would have completely Italianized Ossian. He recognized that:

(...) mi sarebbe stato impossibile di soddisfare al desiderio di tutti i lettori. Alcuni brameranno forse un'esattezza più scrupolosa; altri per avventura avrebbero voluto

²⁴ Cfr. *supra*, p.43, footnote n.17.

ch'io mi fossi scordato affatto che Ossian fosse caledonio, e che lo avessi sfigurato per farlo italiano (...).²⁵

Cesarotti adopted a position half-way between translator and author:

Quanto a me, ho seguito costantemente lo stesso metodo di tradurre, cioè d'esser più fedele allo spirito che alla lettera del mio originale, e di studiarli di tener un personaggio di mezzo fra il traduttore e l'autore.²⁶

On the whole, Cesarotti was very proud of his own contribution to the text and, as a reinforcement of this attitude, he quoted the example of Pope's translation of Homer, written according to similar principles:

(...) se mi si vuol dar carico di aver procurato in vari luoghi di rischiarar il mio originale, di rammorbidirlo e di rettificarlo, e talora anche di abbellirlo e di gareggiar con esso, confesso ch'io sarò più facilmente tentato di pregiarmi di questa colpa che di pentirmene. Ragionando un giorno un mio (...) amico (...) ed essendosi detto da non so chi che l'Omero inglese di Pope non era Omero: - No invero - diss'egli - perché egli è qualche cosa di meglio. - Felice il traduttore che può meritar una tal censura!²⁷

Despite such a tortuous path, and through the complex and contradictory mediation of translations, a new poetic climate was slowly established by the end of the century. The new pre-Romantic poetics were assimilated, stimulating an understanding of primeval sentiment and creativity, opposition to rigid rules, a preference for concrete detail, the personalization of the sublime in the concept of "genius", in short all the elements which were to give rise to the Italian Romantic movement. The important point, in terms of the present study, is that the process of assimilation of the new pre-Romantic outlook was to lead eventually to a full knowledge and appreciation of Shakespeare's work.

²⁵ Cfr. M. Cesarotti, "Discorso premesso alla seconda edizione di Padova del 1772", in Poesie di Ossian antico poeta celtico, reprinted in La letteratura italiana - Storia e testi, a c. di E. Bigi, vol.44, tomo IV; Ricciardi, Verona, 1960, p.90.

²⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, p.90.

²⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, p.92.

Milestones in the history of Shakespeare's reception in 18th century Italy, in the context of "anglomania"

One of the first mentions of anglomania in Italy can be found in Bettinelli's *Lettere inglesi*, where he categorically declared that Italy had received anglomania "di Francia secondo il solito".¹ Despite the extent of French cultural influence, the spread of English culture in Italy was due to a spontaneous Italian tendency, which may well have been encouraged by a parallel trend in France, but was certainly not determined by it.² On the contrary, the origin of anglomania in Italy can largely be attributed to the need for reaction against stifling French cultural oppression. A confirmation of this fact is to be found in Carlo Denina's words:

Les Italiens qui aiment généralement les Anglois, parce-qu'ils n'aiment pas les François qui les ont tant de fois insultés, ont été bien aise non seulement d'avoir une autre nation puissante et fleurissante, en l'exemple de laquelle on pût s'appuyer lorsqu'on voulait faire quelque chose de différent de ce qui était à la mode, mais encore de pouvoir dire et entendre dire par le moyen des traductions des livres Anglois ce que l'on pense peut-être, mais que l'on ose pas dire de son propre chef.³

There is a great difference between the first phase in the early decades of the 18th century, when only a few isolated individuals were in touch with English culture directly, driven by the need for a total renewal of Italian culture, and whose work was known only to restricted groups, and the universal spread of anglomania in the second half of the century, when it was reinforced by the example of France.

¹ Cfr. S. Bettinelli, *Lettere virgiliane e inglesi e altri scritti critici*, Bari, 1930, p.90.

² Cfr. A. Aquarone, "Gusto e costume nell'anglomania settecentesca", *Convivium*, Anno XVI, 1958, fasc. 1^o, nuova serie, pp.43-61:

L'anglomania italiana del secolo XVIII, al di là del puro fatto letterario e, se vogliamo un poco salottiero, s'innesta in quel generale rinnovamento civile che, attraverso il reinserimento della vita spirituale italiana in quella più ricca e feconda del rimanente d'Europa, dalla quale era rimasta per lungo tempo come avulsa, doveva lentamente ma sicuramente stabilire le basi del Risorgimento del secolo seguente. In tale processo, l'accoglimento degli influssi inglesi (...) anche se poteva in un primo tempo essere favorito da quello che fosse l'atteggiamento delle élites francesi, sotto la cui tutela culturale gli Italiani allora si trovavano, aveva necessariamente un posto autonomo e originale, che prescindeva in ultima analisi da quello che potesse esser l'atteggiamento della società transalpina. (p.44)

³ Cfr. Quoted by A. Aquarone, *op.cit.*, pp.44-45.

The first concrete appearance of English influence in Italy is to be seen in the publication of journals and magazines modelled on the Spectator.⁴ Even famous examples, of this trend like Gazzetta veneta and Osservatore veneto (founded by Gaspare Gozzi in Venice in February 1760 and March 1761 respectively) never reached the high standard of their English models,⁵ whereas more affinity with The Spectator is to be found in the Milanese Il Caffè (1764-1766) with its more robust, wide-ranging approach to economic, political, as well as literary and moral problems (with obvious limitations due to the fear of censorship).

Frusta Letteraria, Baretti's pugnacious review, was generally influenced by the Spectator, owing to its founder's long and intimate familiarity with English life and culture, but it was even less similar to it than the other Italian periodicals. As for Baretti's personal relationship to England, this was peculiarly unbalanced and contradictory, as he could easily turn from admiration and sympathy, to the most pessimistic indignation.⁶ There were typical national characteristics of the English, for example their hardworking habits in which Baretti polemically saw the origin of their disagreeable greed for money⁷ a theme which was to become a traditional complaint against England, expressed among others, even by one of the most passionate anglomaniacs, Vittorio Alfieri.

⁴ Cfr. A. Graf, op.cit., p.247:

Accquistarono voga i Saggi. Si esemplarono i giornali; e Magazzini sul far degl'inglesi, si pubblicarono a Venezia, a Firenze, a Livorno.

⁵ Cfr. A. Aquarone, op.cit., p.45-47, for a detailed discussion on this subject.

⁶ Cfr. A. Graf, op.cit., 1911, p.415:

(...) se (Baretti) amò sinceramente l'Inghilterra; se per un segno di questo amore assunse una volta il nome di Lovanglia (...); se finchè gli durò la vita, serbò viva nell'animo la gratitudine per tutti i benefizi ricevuti in quella che considerava una seconda patria; se si vantò di avere un'anima inglese; se disse dell'Inghilterra un mondo di bene; vide anche non pochi mali (...) e non li tacque; e poichè aveva una lingua cui nè egli nè altri poteva por freno, così trasmise talora nei biasimi, e parve trascorrere dall'ingratitude all'odio.

⁷ Cfr. G. Baretti, Lettere famigliari di Giuseppe Baretti ai suoi fratelli, dal 1760 al 1777, Torino.

Ma noi Italiani non siamo a un pezzo così industriosi e così correvi dietro al guadagno come gli Inglesi; se la natura non ci mette in mano le cose belle e fatte, appena ci degniamo aver ricorso all'arte per procacciarcele. Questa nostra indole nulladimeno io non la posso troppo disapprovare perchè quantunque sia vero che buona cosa è l'esser ricco, pure chi più ne ha più ne vorrebbe; e se un tratto cominciassimo a far denari d'ogni cosa, come gl'Inglesi fanno, diventeremmo tanto avidi di roba come sono essi in generale, e per interesse faremmo ogni cattiva cosa (...). (letter dated "24 agosto 1760", from Falmouth)

Baretti's contradictions came out in the clearest way on the occasion of the American War of Independence. While he warmly wished for an English victory in 1776, at the outbreak of the war, within a year he had completely changed his mind, declaring that, in case of England's defeat, "l'albagia e l'insolenza, con cui ha trattato e tratta chiunque (...) sarà rintuzzata; e io godrò (...) ricordandomi specialmente il modo con cui trattò un tempo i napoletani e i genovesi che sono miei compatrioti più che non gl'inglesi."⁸ However, he was absolutely convinced that England had "un potere sterminato, e abbiatelo per sicuro che, se in quest'anno non disfà l'America, la disfarà certamente nel corso dell'anno venturo (...)"⁹ When England was finally defeated, Baretti's unpredictable reaction was that the defeat was due to the English political system being too liberal, even when the nation was in danger:

Così è avvenuto che il sorcio ha morsicato le zampe al leone, e che questa Inghilterra, tanto terribile l'altro dì a tutta l'Europa, è in oggi maltrattata e derisa, assai conculcata e ridotta quasi all'olio santo da quattro gatti. Tanto peggio per lei e per questo suo sistema di governo, o costituzione come dicono essi, tanto da essi decantato, che permette a qualsivoglia nativo di questa isola di dichiararsi amico de'suoi ribelli senza paura della forza.¹⁰

A peculiar characteristic, generally common to Italian anglophiles of the first phase can be detected here: while sincerely admiring the English regime of political freedom, Baretti was not really interested in getting to the heart of the matter and studying the essential principles on which English political institutions were based, so as to understand how these principles were applied. Baretti and many other Italians were simply impressed by the brilliant outward results of the system and did not attempt to go deeper under the surface,¹¹ so that no concrete improvements in this particular area were introduced at first in Italy.

Literary criticism was the area in which admiration for English culture was most productive of new attitudes in Italy, encouraging the opposition to sterile and superficial

⁸ Cfr. G. Baretti, *Epistolario*, Bari, 1936, vol.II, p.229, letter dated 3rd november 1777 to F. Carcano.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Cfr. ibidem, p.232, letter from London, dated "19 dicembre 1777" to Baretti's brother Amedeo.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion on the subject, cfr. A. Aquarone, op.cit., pp.51-53.

academic literature, in favour of a concrete commitment towards social, civil, moral problems,¹² and Baretti, for all his contradictions, admitted that he had learned in England "il modo di riempir un libro di cose e non di ciance".¹³

Francesco Algarotti was an example of real infatuation, completely uncritical and almost fanatic; a great scientific popularizer (his Newtonianismo per le dame was a huge popular success), he also made a great contribution to the knowledge of English literature in Italy, with a marked preference for Pope, largely determining his popularity which remained undisputed until the advent of the new pre-Romantic poets. Algarotti shared the typical Italian indifference for the political and constitutional aspects of English civilization, an aspect which was so widespread that even passionate anglomaniacs like Alessandro Verri¹⁴ and Vittorio Alfieri were not free from it. An extraordinary exception to the rule was V. Martinelli, a Tuscan teacher of Italian in London, who wrote two historical works Storia critica della vita civile and Storia del governo d'Inghilterra, in which he showed a deep spiritual understanding of English society and all its political and constitutional mechanisms, as well as an amused knowledge of more frivolous aspects of daily life. The Florentine L. Angiolini was also an important exception: in his Lettere dall'Inghilterra he carried on an intelligent research on men, institutions, and ideas in a constant effort to understand in the most unprejudiced way the remote reasons for particular customs, political or social habits.

Theatre was the cultural area in which anglomania at first found the greatest obstacles along its way, as it was the area in which French influence was strongest. Moreover, in the context of the almost unknown English theatre, Shakespeare was the least known of all English playwrights.

¹² For an authoritative treatment of the new guidelines of 18th century Italian literary criticism, cfr. M. Fubini, Dal Muratori al Baretti. Bari, 1954.

¹³ Quoted by A. Aquarone, *op.cit.*, p.54.

¹⁴ It is to be stressed in this connection that Alessandro's enthusiasm for England's general atmosphere of tolerance and freedom was mixed with a sense of bewilderment due to his aristocratic outlook as a Milanese patrician, who could not conceive a society without a rigid hierarchical structure.

The very first mention of Shakespeare's name in Italy occurred in a manuscript reporting a journey to England in the year 1667¹⁵, attributed to the Florentine diplomat Lorenzo Magalotti.¹⁶ It is included in a list of misspelt names of English writers without comments of any kind. The list is transcribed by A. Lombardo¹⁷ as follows: "Chacius, Spenns, Drayton, Shakespier, Johnsons, M. Bemont, comico, Flesher, comico". More than fifty years were to elapse before a second mention of Shakespeare's name appeared in print in the diaries of the Florentine doctor Antonio Cocchi, who spent a year in London from 1722 to 1723, in close contact with Rolli's circle. A very short comment on theatrical activities (not mentioning Shakespeare) had in the meantime appeared in a second report¹⁸ on an English journey made by Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany, accompanied by many scholars and artists of his court, including again Magalotti. English prose plays seen by the group were reported to be "confuse, non vi è un'unione nè regola", although they were to be praised for "la galanteria degli abiti, la disinvoltura dell'azione e l'eccellenza dei comici".

Count Magalotti (1637-1712) is believed to have been the first among Italian scholars who took a serious interest in English literature, starting to build the basis on which anglomania was to be established. Besides being a Europe-wide traveller (thus earning the nickname of "Ulisse della Toscana"), he was a versatile linguist and worked on translations of as many languages as Latin, French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish and Arabic. A.M. Crinò, a pioneer in the field of Shakespeare's early reception in Italy, in the course of her studies on Magalotti's English translations in recent years, has discovered an Italian translation of Hamlet's "To Be or not To Be" monologue which, in

¹⁵ Cfr. Codice Stroziano 299, Archivio di Stato, Firenze.

¹⁶ Cfr. A. Graf, op.cit., p.243: "Il Magalotti fu uno dei primissimi a richiamare sulla letteratura inglese l'attenzione degli Italiani e senza aspettare gli esempi e gli eccitamenti di Francia, tradusse (...) un breve frammento del Paradiso perduto del Milton (...) e ammirò lo Shakespeare.

¹⁷ Cfr. A. Lombardo, "Shakespeare e la critica italiana", Sipario, N.218, 1964, p.2.

¹⁸ Cfr. Fondo magliabechiano, Biblioteca Nazionale, Firenze.

her opinion, is to be attributed to Magalotti¹⁹. Another very fleeting comment on English theatre is to be found in Il Teatro Britannico (theatre here is meant in the metaphorical sense of the English historical scene), published in 1684 by the famous Milanese polygraph Gregorio Leti (another early precursor of anglomania who maintained that England was the "Paradiso Terrestre del Genere umano".²⁰ Leti did not mention any English playwrights, but only the "magnificentissimi teatri per rappresentare d'ordinario le commedie e talvolta le opere di musica".²¹

1715 can be considered a significant date in the history of Shakespeare's reception in Italy: in that year two Italian "abati"²² separately arrived in London, and their future direct knowledge of Shakespeare was destined to make an impact - even if to differing extents - on the Italian cultural world for the first time. They were Antonio Conti, the famous mathematician and philosopher from Padua, and Paolo Rolli, the Arcadian literary scholar and poet from Rome, appointed as Italian teacher to the royal family and other members of the nobility. However, 1726 is the first really important date in the history of Shakespeare's reception not only in Italy but in a larger European perspective as it marks the appearance of the first opinion on Shakespeare ever to be printed outside England. It was contained in "Risposta del Sig. Abate Conti al Signore Jacopo Martelli" prefacing Conti's first tragedy Il Cesare²³, in which Conti began by relating how he had come across his subject:

¹⁹ Cfr. A.M. Crinò, "An Unknown 'Verso sciolto' Translation of Hamlet's Soliloquy 'To Be or not To Be' in the Archivio Magalotti", Shakespeare Today: Directions and Methods of Research. Keir Elam ed., La casa Usher, Firenze, 1984, pp.215-220.

²⁰ Quoted by F. Rossi, La cultura inglese a Milano e in Lombardia, nel Seicento e Settecento, Adriatica, Bari, 1970, p.19.

²¹ Quoted by A.M. Crinò, Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento. Roma, 1950, p.32.

²² Cfr. Vernon Lee, op.cit., p.52:

(...) uomini ammogliati, avvocati, medici, scrittori, perfino stranieri, tutti portavano l'abito nero corto e la mantellina, e venivano chiamati Abate. I preti godevano di una libertà quasi licenziosa, dai cardinali che avevano il proprio palco a teatro e davano allegri ricevimenti, fino agli abati più bassi, che affollavano le platee e passavano il tempo nei caffè.

²³ Cfr. Il Cesare. Tragedia del Sig. Ab. Antonio Conti, nobile veneto con alcune cose concernenti l'opera medesima, G.A. Archi, in Faenza, 1726, pp.54-55.

(...) il Duca di Buckingham mi diede a leggere due Tragedie, che aveva fatte; il Cesare, il Bruto, che propriamente non sono che il Cesare del Sasper diviso in due.

This very first mention, in a deformed version, of Shakespeare's name was followed by the short passage which was to become famous throughout Italy and Europe:

Sasper è il Cornelio degl'Inglesi, ma molto più irregolare del Cornelio, sebbene al pari di lui pregno di grandi idee, e di nobili sentimenti.

A significant implication of this passage is that Conti was so imbued with French classicist taste that the touchstone for any literary phenomenon could only be for him a French writer, and he could not realize, in this context, the unsuitability of a comparison of Shakespeare with a champion of classicism such as Corneille.

Conti goes on to describe the structure of Julius Caesar, pointing out Shakespeare's absolute disrespect for the dramatic rules:

Restringendomi qui a parlare del suo Cesare, il Sasper lo fa morire al terzo atto, il rimanente della Tragedia è occupato dall'arringa di Marc-antonio al Popolo, indi dalle guerre e dalla morte di Cassio e Bruto. Può maggiormente violarsi l'unità del tempo, dell'azione e del luogo?

But, as already mentioned, Conti's classicism was of a particularly complex nature, and he supported only a purely instrumental observance of the rules, aware as he was of how a free, irregular treatment of subject such as Shakespeare's could allow immense emotional possibilities. He therefore recognizes that English theatre, before Addison's time, was popular and entertaining just because its only aim was the pleasure of the audience and all abstract principles were unhesitatingly discarded:

Ma gli Inglesi disprezzarono fino al Catone le regole d'Aristotele per la ragione, che la Tragedia è fatta per piacere, e che ottima ella è allora che piace; contenesse ella cento azioni diverse, e trasportasse personaggi dalla Europa nell'Asia, e finissero vecchi, ove cominciarono fanciulli.

Spanish theatre was more popular than the English in 17th century Italy and, to Conti's surprise, nobody had ever thought of translating English theatre works, which were of a much superior quality:

Così pensava cred'io la maggior parte degli Italiani del 1600 guasti dalle Commedie Spagnole; e mi meraviglio, come in quel secolo niuno si sia avvisato di tradurre in Italiano le Commedie e le Tragedie inglesi, colme d'accidenti come le Spagnuole, ma certamente con caratteri più naturali e leggiadri.

Through those translations, English history would have been known in Italy and Conti introduces here his favourite theme of national history as the most suitable subject for tragedy:

L'Italia avrebbe se non imparata tutta la storia de i Re d'Inghilterra, che da' loro poeti è stata posta sul teatro, ogni vita di Re dando materia ad una tragedia.

Finally, Conti refers to Addison's Cato (generally admired in Italy for its balanced style and observance of the rules) as, for some aspects, superior even to Corneille's tragedies, but finds some faults in it which, he points out, the Duke of Buckingham has avoided in his re-writing of Julius Caesar, while still preserving some important Shakespearian elements:

La prima tragedia regolare degli inglesi è il Catone del Sig. Addisson. Il carattere di Catone è maraviglioso, e di tutt'altro gusto, che non sono i caratteri ideali, e troppo giganteschi, attribuiti talvolta dal Cornelio a' Romani. Ma l'episodio degli amori introdotto nel Catone lo guasta, onde dal Cesare gli esclude il Duca di Buckingham, benchè poi cangi la scena al fine di ogni atto, e faccia morire Cesare in Senato a vista degli spettatori: e dopo la sua morte introduca l'aringa di Marcantonio al popolo per conservare il bel fondo di quella del Sasper.

J.G. Robertson has underlined how Conti's judgement was soon to influence critical opinion both in Italy and the rest of Europe:

The importance of this statement is that here, for the first time, we find a critic outside England not merely regarding Shakespeare with respect, but hinting at the possibility of the continental nation learning from him.²⁴

while elsewhere he insists on Conti's influence on Voltaire's La Mort de César and on the Swiss critic Bodmer.²⁵ On the contrary, an earlier critic E. Bouvy, had tried to prove Conti's indebtedness to Voltaire for his other tragedies.²⁶

Voltaire in fact repeated Conti's statement almost exactly in his famous 18th "lettre philosophique": "Shakespear, qui passoit pour le Corneille des Anglais, fleurissoit à peu près dans le temps de Lopez de Véga; il créa le théâtre", and only in his late negative

²⁴ Cfr. J.G. Robertson, "The Knowledge of Shakespeare on the Continent at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century", The Modern Language Review, I, 1905-1906, pp.

²⁵ Cfr. J.G. Robertson, Studies in the Genesis of Romantic Theory in the Eighteenth Century. Cambridge University Press, 1923.

²⁶ Cfr. E. Bouvy, Voltaire et l'Italie (Paris, 1898), Slatkine Reprints, Genève, 1970, p.240.

phase against Shakespeare did he change the parallel Shakespeare/Corneille into Shakespeare/Sophocles in the subsequent editions.²⁷

With regard to Bodmer, it appears that he was led by Conti's example into changing the spelling "Shakespear" or "Shakspear" into "Sasper" or "Saspar".²⁸ Robertson's thesis according to which Bodmer's change of spelling was due to a particular feeling of pro-Italian admiration as well as that of Conti's influence on Voltaire and even on Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* was later accepted, among others, also by P. Van Tieghem; he was persuaded that Conti had been the first in Europe to mention Shakespeare with a direct knowledge and appreciation for his works, and he thought this was proved by the fact that he had dared to "placer l'auteur de *Jules César* sur un pied d'égalité avec un des maîtres de la scène européenne".²⁹

In the course of the 19th century, as Shakespeare progressively acquired an important place in the context of Italian Romantic culture, the problem of the evaluation of the Conti/Shakespeare relationship gave rise to a very heated discussion among Italian critics³⁰ about the extent of Conti's knowledge of Shakespeare and of Conti's possible

²⁷ On the subject of the Conti/Voltaire relationship, Cfr. G. Gronda, "Antonio Conti e l'Inghilterra", *English Miscellany*, 15, 1964, op.cit., p.164, footnote 64:

Particolarmente interessato al rapporto Conti/Voltaire è anche lo studioso M. Wolff ("Antonio Conti in seinem Verhältnis zu Shakespeare", *The Journal of English and German Philology*, XXXVII, 1938, pp.555-558) che s'immagina il giovane Arouet ascoltare in casa del cardinale Bentivoglio, intorno al 1718, la lettura del *Giulio Cesare* del Conti, e ritiene verosimile che "er bei dieser Gelegenheit zuerst etwas Genaueres über den englischen Dramatiker hörte, dessen Name seit 1715 in der Pariser Gesellschaft bekannt zu werden anfang, allerdings ohne dass jemand eines seiner seltsamen Werke gelesen hatte", (p.557)

²⁸ Cfr. G. Gronda, ibidem:

Sulla grafia Sasper in Bodmer, oggetto di una serie di ricerche particolari anche prima del Robertson (A. Korberstein, K. Elze, Th. Vetter, M. Antoniewicz) ritornarono nel 1912 A. Richter (*Shakespeare in Deutschland, in den Jahren 1739-1770*, Oppeln) e nel 1937 G. Becker ("J.J. Bodmer' "Sasper", in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 73, XIV, 1937, pp.139-141). Il primo, richiamandosi alle ricerche precedenti, spiegava la grafia di Bodmer come dovuta ad un errore di stampa della scrittura fonetica tedesca Saksper, Sakspar; il secondo, ritornando alla tesi del Robertson, interpretava l'adozione della forma contiana come segno della particolare ammirazione filo-italiana del Bodmer.

²⁹ Cfr. P. Van Tieghem, "La découverte de Shakespeare sur le continent", in *Le Prérromantisme*, Paris, 1947, p.16.

³⁰ Cfr. G. Gronda, "Antonio Conti e l'Inghilterra", op.cit., p.163:

La tesi dell'imitazione shakespeareana nelle tragedie del Conti, sostenuta dal Cantù, dal Guerzoni, dal Morsolin ed in particolare dalla monografia di A. Zardo (*Un tragico padovano del secolo scorso*, Padova, 1884) trionfò nelle affermazioni del Finzi: "Compose pertanto al modo di Shakespeare

imitation of Shakespeare's works, as well as about the existence and the importance of pre-romantic elements in Conti's conception of literature. G. Finzi, the most extreme among those convinced that Conti had closely imitated Shakespeare did not hesitate to declare that Conti had discovered Shakespeare for the first time in Italy and was therefore to be considered the first Italian Romantic in as much as:

Le idee fondamentali del romanticismo, cioè il ritorno al semplice e al vero, l'abbandono della mitologia e degli argomenti classici, la preferenza data agli argomenti medievali e religiosi, il ritorno alle tradizioni e alla poesia popolare orientale e cristiana, erano già chiaramente divisati nella mente di un italiano ancor nel 1719.³¹

Finzi's opinion was successfully refuted by the leader of the opposite side, G. Brognoligo,³² who rejected the idea of Conti's close relationship to Shakespeare on the grounds that in the famous passage Conti had expressed himself in rather cold and impersonal terms, whereas he had always shown the warmest enthusiasm for Racine's and Maffei's works. Moreover, Brognoligo stressed as a very significant element in favour of the thesis of Conti's substantial indifference to Shakespeare, the fact that, when translating The Rape of the Lock, Conti explained an allusion to Othello in a footnote in such laconic terms ("S'allude qui ad un passo di una tragedia inglese") that he did not even mention Shakespeare's name.³³ Brognoligo also made a detailed comparative analysis of Conti's Il Cesare and Marco Bruto and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, and verified the application of Conti's theories on tragedy in his writings. Brognoligo's conclusion was that:

Come tutti in generale i suoi contemporanei anche il Conti riteneva lo Shakespeare per un ingegno rozzo, ma non affatto sprovvisto di merito, non poteva negare che

quattro tragedie, in una delle quali gareggiò collo Shakespeare sullo stesso argomento" (G. Finzi, Lezioni di storia della letteratura italiana. Torino, 1891, p.23).

³¹ Quoted by G. Gronda, "Antonio Conti e l'Inghilterra", op.cit., p.163.

³² Cfr. G. Brognoligo, "Le imitazioni shakespeariane di Antonio Conti", Rassegna padovana. I, 1891, pp.5-11.

³³ Pope's line was translated as follows: "(...) né così disperato il fiero Otello / sul fatal fazzoletto infuria e mugge" (Quoted by G. Gronda "Tradizione e innovazione: le versioni poetiche di Antonio Conti", op.cit., p.324). It is to be noted, in this connection that G. Gronda in the article just quoted does not consider this quotation as a suitable argument in favour of Brognoligo's thesis, because it was the normal practice of the period not to mention the author's name in quotations.

le bellezze ci fossero nelle sue tragedie, ma riconoscendole deplorava che fossero smarrite come perle nel fango fra tante brutture.³⁴

In this way Brognoligo was able to reject the thesis of Conti's imitation of Shakespeare and trace back the origin of the four tragedies to Conti's own theoretical conception of tragic theatre and to Conti's own didactic aims.

Shortly afterwards, two other scholars, F. Colagrosso³⁵ and A. Salza,³⁶ also admitted that Conti's tragedies were only distantly inspired by Shakespeare, while after the turn of the century, Collison Morley³⁷ expressed a very reductive opinion on the matter, maintaining that Conti had only heard vague references to Shakespeare during conversations with friends or in discussions about Buckingham's tragedies.

J.G. Robertson³⁸ later re-confirmed Conti's independence from Shakespeare, although he recognized the influence of Shakespeare's histories on Conti's interest in history as a source for tragedy. In 1950, A.M. Crinò³⁹ also stressed that, when mentioning the reasons for choosing a Roman subject, Conti "non accenna menomamente all'influenza che su tale decisione può avere avuto la sua relazione col Duca di Buckingham, come mai accennò in modo esplicito ad una sua conoscenza diretta dell'opera di Shakespeare". A turning point in the critical debate was made by G. Gronda⁴⁰ in the following terms:

Oggi che il problema dei rapporti Shakespeare-Conti è stato a lungo esaurientemente studiato e tutti i critici sono d'accordo nel sostenere che l'importanza storica del giudizio contiano sul tragico inglese non va confusa con una inesistente influenza letteraria sul Nostro, abbandonata l'alternativa di shakespeareano o non shakespeareano, romantico o classicista, occorre a mio avviso volgere l'attenzione agli interessanti contatti che il Conti ebbe con altri poeti

³⁴ Cfr. G. Brognoligo, "L'opera letteraria di Antonio Conti", *Ateneo Veneto*. XVII-XVIII, 1893-94, IV, p.325.

³⁵ Cfr. F. Colagrosso, *La prima tragedia di Antonio Conti*. 1893, Napoli.

³⁶ Cfr. A. Salza, "L'abate Antonio Conti e le sue tragedie", *Annali della Scuola normale di Pisa*, XIII, 1899, pp.1-20.

³⁷ Cfr. L. Collison Morley, *Shakespeare in Italy*. Stratford, 1916, p.8.

³⁸ Cfr. J.G. Robertson, *Studies in the Genesis* op.cit., p.104-105.

³⁹ Cfr. A.M. Crinò, *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare* ... op.cit., p.35.

⁴⁰ Cfr. G. Gronda, "Antonio Conti e l'Inghilterra", op.cit., pp.164-165.

inglesi,⁴¹ e rilevare nelle sue traduzioni e nei suoi commenti ad esse, l'importanza della funzione di mediatore che il Conti esercitò nel primo settecento in Italia sul piano del gusto oltre che della conoscenza della letteratura inglese.

G.E. Dorris⁴² later revived Robertson's opinion on the importance of Shakespeare's historical drama and pointed out that Conti's Roman tragedies "suggest one lesson that Conti learned from Shakespeare, the depiction of history through the drama". Like Rolli, Conti particularly admired the idea of the chronicle play, "a model" Dorris goes on, "which he felt Italy might well follow and which he initiated in his four Roman plays". In the late 1970s, M. Ariani also pointed out that what Conti had learned from Shakespeare was a "lezione drammaturgica che pone la storia nazionale come unico tragediabile possibile".⁴³ This seems to be the inevitable conclusion to be drawn from the above debate and which is also confirmed by Conti's own words:⁴⁴

Gl'Inglese amano le Tragedie dei loro Re, perché dei fatti domestici meglio s'impara, che da' stranieri. Noi siamo tutti Cittadini d'Italia; egli ci è dunque naturale amar le cose che accaderono nel nostro Paese, e lusingarci almeno con la memoria della grandezza delle virtù, e dell'imperio di coloro, che dominarono tutto il resto della terra a lor nota, e vi dominano ancora colle leggi, che a tutte l'altre Nazioni parteciparono. In ordine al preposto disegno ho io composto quattro tragedie, che contengono l'Epoche principali dello stabilimento della Repubblica, del suo cangiamento in Monarchia, e de' vizj strabocchevoli de' Monarchi.

On the other hand, as regards his choice of subjects, Conti seems to have been mainly influenced by Gravina ("Il Gravina pretendeva che sul teatro non si dovessero introdurre se non quelle nazioni, che da violente passioni sono signoreggiate; ma in sei o sette tragedie che ha fatte, ne ha scelte tre nella storia Romana"⁴⁵), as well as by Corneille, Racine and Addison ("Le migliori tragedie del Cornelio, e una delle più belle del Racine sono tolte dalla medesima storia, non meno che la Tragedia del Sig. Addison (...) I costumi Romani più si proporzionano a' nostri costumi, che i Greci e i Barbari

⁴¹ The author goes on to mention Milton, Pope, Swift, Prior, Dryden, and a close personal friend, Lady Mary Montagu.

⁴² Cfr. G.E. Dorris, Paolo Rolli and the Italian Circle in London. 1715-1744, Mouton, The Hague-Paris, 1967.

⁴³ Cfr. M. Ariani, op.cit., p.155.

⁴⁴ Cfr. Prose e Poesie del Signor Abate Antonio Conti Patrizio veneto - Tomo primo - Parte Prima - In Venezia presso Giambattista Pasquali, MDCCXXXIX, Prefazione, p. g.

⁴⁵ Cfr. Il Cesare, op.cit., p.66.

(...)"⁴⁶. In the light of a deeper understanding of Conti as a man and as a writer, it is easy to see that the 1726 statement, while retaining its great historical impact, is not equally important from a critical point of view, as Conti's judgements on Shakespeare's works appear superficial and vague.

Rolli is a completely different case: in terms of temperature, his enthusiasm for Shakespeare might be said to be almost boiling hot, compared with Conti's lukewarm and perplexed feeling of appreciation. The next landmark in the history of Shakespeare's reception, which we owe to Rolli, is extremely important both from a historical and a critical point of view.

It is contained in the preface to the first Italian edition of Rolli's translation of the first six books of Paradise Lost,⁴⁷ published in Verona in 1730. This Verona edition can be considered as a milestone in the history of Shakespeare's reception in Italy not only because it dwells at some length on various plays for the first time after Conti's very fleeting comment in 1726 (and can therefore be considered the second earliest mention of Shakespeare to appear in print in Italy) but also because it shows a new, more sensitive and unprejudiced critical attitude: Rolli's knowledge of Shakespeare was at the same time genuinely first-hand and completely free from any conditioning by the French intellectual dictatorship.

While in his Vita di Milton which prefaced the London edition of his translation Rolli had discussed Shakespeare's achievement at length,⁴⁸ adding some remarks on Il

⁴⁶ Cfr. Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Il Paradiso Perduto, poema inglese del Signor Milton tradotto in nostra lingua al quale si premettono Osservazioni sopra il Libro del Signor Voltaire che esamina l'Epica Poesia delle Nazioni Europee (scritte originalmente in inglese, e in Londra stampate nel 1728, poi nella propria lingua tradotte), e al Marchese Scipione Maffei dedicato da Paolo Rolli, Verona, Alberto Tumermani Libraio, 1730.

⁴⁸ After some pioneering remarks on the nature of blank verse and on the influence of Italian writers on English poetry Rolli makes an original comparison between "Galfredo" Chaucer ("che pronunciassi - Ciaser") and Shakespeare. The latter is exalted as the poet who "elevò il teatro inglese a insuperabile sublimità con le sue tragedie", besides, "Quel che farà sempre scintillare la gloria dell'inglese tragico Shakespeare sul teatro britanno è quella forza d'evidenza nel dipingere i caratteri degl' Inglesi e de' Romani grand'uomini nelle sue tragedie; sì vivamente rappresentandoli nelle loro virtù, temperamenti e difetti". He also praises Shakespeare's chronicle plays for admirably performing what he thinks is the most important function of theatre, that is the didactic function of teaching history:

Questo prodigioso ingegno (...) scrisse alcune tragedie che io chiamerei istoriche, poichè rappresentano tratti istorici dei Re e Patrizi illustri della sua nazione: ed in queste i fatti ed i caratteri

Moro di Venezia, in the Osservazioni prefacing the Verona edition he examined Henry IV and Richard II, and did not miss the opportunity of pointing out Voltaire's lack of information about Shakespeare ("Voltaire non ha letto ancora (...) né la tragedia di Macbeth di Shakespeare, che a mio senno è la più bella Tragedia inglese, né l'altra sua Tragedia intitolata La Tempesta".) Rolli's most important contribution to the history of Shakespeare's reception is contained in the preface to the volume of his translations of Anacreon's odes from Latin into Italian⁴⁹: his translation of Hamlet's monologue "To Be or not To Be". This is the first Shakespearian passage ever printed in Italian (although not printed in Italy, but in London). Until Crinò's recent discovery of the hitherto unknown translation of the monologue attributed to Magalotti, this text was considered to be the first Shakespearian passage ever translated into Italian, inaugurating, as it were, the series of associations of Hamlet with the history of Shakespeare's reception in Italy. The unpublished translation discovered by Crinò seems to reinforce the link of Hamlet with the history of Shakespeare's Italian reception, while also re-confirming P. Van Tieghem's opinion that the monologue "was the first Shakespearian passage to enter the intellectual substance and climate of Continental letters, the first to achieve a respectability equal to that of certain passages in Lucretius and Seneca".⁵⁰

Another aspect of this Shakespearian landmark is that it is closely connected with Rolli's polemical relations with Voltaire. Rolli in fact makes a comparison of his own meticulously faithful free verse translation with Voltaire's internationally famous one in the following terms:

de 'Personaggi interlocutori sono così vivi e poeticamente con adattissimo stile espressi, che nulla più.

Rolli's enthusiasm for Shakespeare leads him to think that Milton must have learned from him "la sciolta sua sublime versificazione". Lastly, another original critical remark is contained in the same essay: for the first time Dante and Shakespeare are approached as two great poets whose seminal achievement in their respective national languages make him "altamente meravigliare d'avere i primi tanto sublimemente poetato nella lor lingua". In this case too Rolli was a precursor, as this position was to be adopted by the Romantic movement in the following century.

⁴⁹ Cfr. Delle Ode di Anacreonte Teio traduzione di Paolo Rolli, Londra, 1739.

⁵⁰ Cfr. P. Van Tieghem, op.cit., pp.99-100.

M. de Voltaire in una delle sue lettere sovra la Nazione Britannica, ragionando del famoso tragico Shakespeare per darne qualche saggio, tradusse il soliloquio nella tragedia d'Amleto Principe di Danimarca. Questa litteral traduzione mostrerà quanto egli deviò da' sentimenti e dallo stile di quell'originalmente sublime poeta. I versi originali sono XXXII, tradotti XXXIX.

Rolli's translation ran as follows:

Essere o no, la gran Questione è questa:
Qual nella mente è forte più? Soffrire
Colpi e Saette d'oltraggiosa Sorte;
O prender l'Armi contra un mar d'Affanni,
E dar loro, in opporsi, *a un tratto* il fine?
Morir! Dormire: Altro non è. Nel Sonno,
Dicon, che fine avrà il Cordoglio, e mille,
Retaggio della Carne, altre Sciagure:
Consumazion, d'avida Brama oggetto!
Morir! Dormir! Dormir? forse Sognar! Ah
Qui è l'Intoppo! Chè in quel Sonno di Morte
Quai sogni possan venir poi che avremo
Scossa alla fin questa mortale Spoglia;
Suspendron l'Alma. Ecco il Riflesso ond'anno
Nostre calamità sì lunga Vita.
Altrimente, Chi mai soffrir le *atroci*
Del suo tempo vorrìa Sferzate e Scherni,
Torti d'Oppressione, Onte d'Orgoglio,
Fiere Agonie di disprezzato Amore,
Leggi indugiate, Autorità insolente
E quei che il Merto paziente *oppresso*
Aspri riceve dal Demerto Oltraggi;
Quando ei dar si potesse alta Quietè
Con la punta d'un Ago? E chi la grave
Soma portar vorrìa; Chi sotto a stanca
Vita, gemer, sudar; senza il Terrore
Di spaventevol Cosa appo la Morte?
Quelle contrade incognite dal cui
Confine mai Viaggiator non torna,
La Volontà sgomentano e ci fanno
Piuttosto i Mali sostener presenti;
Che sciorre ad altri sconosciuti il volo.
Coscienza Così di tutti Noi
Tanti Codardi fa: così 'l nativo
Suo robusto color Risoluzione
Smarrisce in pensierosa Pallidezza:
E le imprese di grande Auge e Momento,
Arrestate da un tal Riguardo; svolgono
Lor Corrente, e d'Azzion perdono il Nome.

This translation certainly does show a good understanding of the text and can be favourably compared with the best ones published in the following century. As in the case of his translation of Paradise Lost, Rolli is particularly interested in the statistical calculation of the words employed in the translation. He seems to consider it as a useful tool for the assessment of the quality of translations in general, according to his lucid

intuitions about the different nature of English and Italian. The importance of this first Shakespearian translation also lies in the fact that it started a trend characterized by a very honest and conscientious attitude to the original, considerably removed from Voltaire's clever way of manipulating the text to his own ends.

As already mentioned, Rolli was one of the very few Italian men of letters totally immune to Voltaire's influence, but an important point is to be made in connection with the Rolli/Voltaire polemic and its importance in the history of Shakespeare's reception in Italy. It was precisely owing to his polemical conflict with Voltaire that Rolli was stimulated to introduce Shakespeare into Italian literature for the first time. Rather ironically, for he actually held very conservative views, Voltaire became in Rolli's case (as in many other instances) an extraordinary stimulus for the birth of new outlooks and the questioning of accepted values.

Later on in the century, Giuseppe Baretti was to take up Rolli's place in the scanty Italian anti-Voltaireian and pro-Shakespearian party. Like Rolli, Baretti too answered Voltaire's essay on epic poetry; in 1753 he published an essay⁵¹ which was to form the basis of the most important landmark in Shakespeare's Italian reception in the 18th century (again not printed in Italy), the famous Discours sur Shakespeare et sur Monsieur de Voltaire.

Apart from Domenico Valentini's translation of Julius Caesar in 1756 (the first complete translation of a Shakespearian play into Italian) all the other 18th century landmarks in Shakespeare's Italian reception are connected with Hamlet. The first staging in Italy of a Shakespearian adaptation (Ducis' Hamlet translated by Francesco Gritti) took place in 1774. Gritti's translation was prefaced by what can be considered the first really complete account of a Shakespearian play ever printed in Italy. In 1777 Baretti published his Discours, which mainly dealt with Voltaire's harsh criticism against Hamlet and which

⁵¹ A Dissertation upon the Italian Poets, in which are intersperced some Remarks On Mr Voltaire's Essay on the Epic Poets. London, printed for R. Dodsley, MDCCLIII. He again took up the same subject ten years later, as entertainingly as always, in an article in which he admitted that with regard to comedy and tragedy the French were giants and Italian dwarfs, but, as far as epic poetry was concerned, the Italians were "giganti gigantacci" while the Frenchmen were "nani piccini piccini". Cfr. La Frusta Letteraria. VIII, 15.1.1764, p.207, "Dei Discorsi Toscani del Dott. Andrea Cocchi, Parte Seconda, Firenze, 1762, in 4^o".

can be considered as the first important piece of criticism of European standard of a Shakespearian play by an Italian author.

The first official Shakespearian performance in 18th century Italy took place in 1791: it was a Hamlet staged by the promising young actor Morrocchesi and was a total fiasco, while the first really successful performance of Hamlet took place in Bologna in 1795.

In this chronological account a special place is to be accorded to Alessandro Verri, the first translator of Hamlet into Italian, as his translation, started in 1769 and completed in 1777, was neither published nor staged. Had Alessandro's translation been published, it would have been the first really serious attempt in any European literature of a complete translation of Hamlet⁵² since it preceded Letourneur's translation, published in 1779.

⁵² As mentioned before, La Place's translation of Hamlet appeared in France in 1746 in the second volume, which also contained Richard III and Macbeth. This Hamlet was an incomplete, distorted paraphrase of Shakespeare's play. Ducis' adaptation, based on this version appeared in 1769. The first German translation of Hamlet was published by F.W. Wieland, in 1766, but it could be described at best as:

a prose version of Warburton's text, limited by the translator's scanty knowledge of Elizabethan English. He adds and subtracts, at times is too cursory and at others too verbose. (...) Its greatest importance, however, lies in the fact that it helped to make possible a stage version in the next decade. (Cfr. P.S. Conklin, op.cit., pp.99-100)

PART II

ANTONIO CONTI, PAOLO ROLLI, VOLTAIRE, GIUSEPPE BARETTI: THEIR RESPECTIVE ROLES IN SHAKESPEARE'S RECEPTION IN 18TH CENTURY ITALY, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO HAMLET

Conti and Rolli

The first two Italians who were to influence in a different measure the history of Shakespeare's reception in Italy, arrived in London in the same year, but their departure from Italy had taken place at different dates. While Rolli left for London directly in 1715, Conti had left Italy much earlier, in 1713, to go to Paris.

Conti, a passionate supporter of cartesian rationalism and English empiricism, had left his cultivated Venetian environment determined to get in touch with the original sources of the two movements¹, anticipating what was to become typical 18th century scientific cosmopolitanism. The first stop on Conti's European itinerary was Paris, where his social and economic position ensured him access to noble and academic circles, allowing him to meet the most notable philosophers and mathematicians of the day. Scientific interests drove him on to London², where, while leading an intense social life, he participated as mediator for peace in the famous Newton-Leibniz quarrel, the only practical result of which being that he lost Newton's friendship. In the same year, 1715, he switched to literary interests (which had been only a minor occupation until then) owing to his bad health which obliged him to take up a lighter activity than science, as he explains in the preface to the first volume of his works³.

¹ According to Conti's official biographer Giuseppe Toaldo, he "Volea bere al fonte, e udire i sistemi e le teorie dalla bocca dei loro autori: era poi così avido di sapere che mal tollerava il ritardo delle stampe per istruirsi delle novelle scoperte". Quoted by G. Gronda in "Antonio Conti e l'Inghilterra", op.cit., p.136.

² According to Toaldo: "Il soggetto del nostro viaggio altro non fu che la curiosità di vedere il Newtono e la grande eclissi", quoted by G. Gronda, ibidem, p.137.

³ Cfr. Prose e Poesie, op.cit., p.i.

In tutto il corso della mia vita non mi applicai che alla Filosofia, alla Matematica, ed alla Teologia naturale e rivelata; sferzato da gravi infermità, che mi molestarono in Inghilterra e in Francia, mi applicai alla Poesia per un accidente, che io chiamerò fortunato, perché mi servì molto di sollievo per distrarre lo spirito senza fatica nelle disgrazie domestiche che mi accaddero, (...).

He had contacts with the Italian group around Rolli, which included both temporary visitors like Scipione Maffei and the Florentine doctor Antonio Cocchi, and residents like the diplomat Giuseppe Riva, but Conti never had any close relationship with Rolli himself⁴ although they had many literary and musical interests, as well as publishing activities, in common.⁵ While Conti kept rather distant from critical debates on English literature during his three-year stay in London, Rolli, although not such an interesting and open critical mind as Conti, became involved in internationally important discussions with Voltaire. Conti's appreciation of English literature was deeply influenced by his classicist background⁶ and consequently he was attracted into the cultural circle of the Duke of Buckingham, where Dryden's teaching was still very much alive. It was for this reason that he failed to come into contact with the new English trends in literary aesthetics determined by Locke's and Hutcheson's theories and their emphasis on the inter-subjectivity of mind and things (later to lead to the birth of the Romantic movement) through which he could have had a better understanding of Shakespeare.⁷ If he could not understand Shakespeare fully, though, he certainly admired him and this meant he occupied a rather progressive position in England at a time when Pope had only just started to re-evaluate Shakespeare, still mixing praise and criticism.⁸ Temple, Pope, and Addison were among Conti's favourite reading during

⁴ In this connection cfr. G. Gronda, op.cit., p.143:

(...) il Conti si ricordò di lui (Rolli) solo raramente e di sfuggita, quasi che la diversa classe sociale che teneva distinti a Saint James il nobile scienziato veneto e il precettore d'italiano dei figli di Giorgio II si fosse riflessa anche sui loro rapporti letterari e personali.

⁵ Both Conti and Rolli were interested in Racine and Milton, and both translated *Athalie*. Conti also wrote a preface to the translation of Lucrece edited by Rolli in 1717. Cfr. ibidem.

⁶ According to J.G. Robertson, op. cit., p.108, Conti was too "rigidly bounded by the canons of French taste" to be able to really appreciate typical English authors.

⁷ Cfr. V. MacHamm, "Antonio Conti and English Aesthetics", *Comparative Literature*. Vol.8, 1956, pp.12-27.

⁸ Cfr. G. Schiavello, *La fama di Shakespeare nel secolo 18^o*: Camerino, 1903.

his stay in London, and traces of their influence, especially regarding the high value attributed to the imagination, were to be found in Conti's subsequent work in Paris, where he returned in 1718. He took a decidedly anti-modernist position in the French literary "querelle", another reflection of his deep respect for the humanist tradition of Anglo-Saxon classicism⁹, in which he saw stylistic clarity and correctness assuming the substance of a moral ideal.¹⁰

Conti returned to Italy in 1726, and the publication, in the same year, of his first Roman tragedy Il Cesare was warmly welcomed by the Italian literary world and staged with remarkable success. Toaldo's account¹¹ of how Conti took up the writing of his first tragedy follows closely Conti's own account¹², as well as inevitably quoting Conti's fundamental parallel with Corneille. However what is especially fascinating is the biographer's reverent attention to Conti's personal feelings which slowly lead to the decision to write Il Cesare, in contrast to the very swift rhythm of the actual writing of the tragedy:

(...) il suo Cesare (...) comparve alla luce alla fine di questo stesso anno (1726), ed avea cominciato undici anni prima in Inghilterra. Dimorando nella campagna di Chisington, e leggendo i poeti inglesi, gli venne alle mani il Sasper, che può chiamarsi il Cornelio d'Inghilterra, il quale compose una Tragedia sulla morte di Giulio Cesare, in cui tra i molti difetti regnano delle parti molto belle. Conversando poi col Duca di Buckingham, che avea pur fatte due Tragedie collo stesso soggetto diviso nel Cesare e nel Bruto, s'innamorò a poco a poco del carattere di Cesare, e cominciò a studiarlo negli Storici Romani, e qui concepì la prima idea della sua Tragedia, di cui non fece allora che abbozzare qualche scena. Ritornato in Francia dopo qualche anno ripigliò il suo piccolo abbozzo; vi cambiò e vi aggiunse molte cose, e si mise a verificarlo seriamente, del che venne a capo in due mesi.

Conti's return to Italy, far from being a spiritual retirement to self-limiting

⁹ Cfr. Gr. Gronda, "Antonio Conti e l'Inghilterra", op.cit., pp.146-149.

¹⁰ In this connection cfr. Conti's opinion on The Essay of Man, as an example of serious moral commitment in comparison with the abstract petrarchism of Italian poets, who did not realize that "...il poeta, secondo l'etimologia del nome, è creatore, e che la facoltà civile l'obbliga a dirigere l'opere della sua creazione all'utile della società." Quoted ibidem, p.147.

¹¹ Cfr. Prose e Poesie op.cit., Tomo Secondo e Postumo (edited by G. Toaldo), cui precedono le Notizie spettanti alla sua vita, e suoi studi. In Venezia presso Giambattista Pasquali, MDCCLVI, Cap. XIV "Suo ritorno in Italia 1726, Edizione del Cesare", pp.60-61.

¹² Cfr. supra p.53, "Milestones...".

provincialism¹³, started a lifelong (his death occurred in 1749) strenuous re-elaboration of up-to-date accumulated learning in an extraordinary variety of cultural fields (philosophy, science, aesthetics, poetry, theatre) all unified by the same search for the transgressive potentialities of modern lay culture. Such a multiplicity of converging interests was enough to confirm Conti as perhaps the most rebellious of early 18th century Italian intellectuals. The other side of the coin, however, was, as pointed out by J.G. Robertson,¹⁴ that his intellectual and literary work, so distinctively marked by his long residence abroad, covered an excessively wide range of different fields, and the sum of it was in the end disappointing. Conti's insatiable thirst for knowledge and vast ideas were not accompanied by a sufficient tenacity of purpose to bring them to concrete completion and the result was that he dissipated an enormous amount of energy. His turning from scientific to literary interests was probably a primary cause of the rather inconclusive nature of his career, but, as he himself explained,¹⁵ it was also a source of existential gratification. On the whole, though, Conti can well be considered "one of the central figures for the development on the continent of interest in (...) English letters".¹⁶

As already mentioned, many differences mark the life, works, and character of Rolli and Conti the first two protagonists of the history of Shakespeare's reception in Italy. Although Rolli belonged to a lower social category than Conti, this did not

¹³ Cfr. M. Ariani, *op.cit.*, p.87:

Ritorno che serviva al Conti per denunciare e misurare l'enorme arretratezza culturale dell'Italia all'altezza del 1726, come risulta da un passo della Risposta al Martello dove si scaglia duramente contro un certo tipo di provincia intellettuale del tempo: "Non è facile il credere, come i fanciulli inglesi, allevati in tali Accademie parlino con maggiore intelligenza e franchezza del peso dell'aria, della varia refrangibilità de' raggi, delle leggi della percossa, delle forze centrifughe, e de' moti uniformi e accelerati, che certi professori in Italia, non in altro consumati, che in asciutte e litigiose quistioni scolastiche."

¹⁴ Cfr. J.G. Robertson, Studies on the Genesis(...) *op.cit.*, p. 108.

¹⁵ Cfr. *supra* pp.64-65 "Rolli and Conti".

¹⁶ Cfr. G.E. Dorris, *op.cit.*, p.229.

prevent him from becoming a key figure in the cultural interchange between England and Italy.

He went on playing this important role for nearly thirty years (1715-1744), translating and teaching Italian to the royal family and members of the nobility, engaging in polemic attacks on Voltaire and Sir Robert Walpole, providing libretti (called by him "dramatici scheletri") for the most famous musicians of the day and editing numerous Italian literary works, "mosso dalle istanze di non pochi Cavalieri inglesi amantissimi della nostra poesia".¹⁷ But, most important of all, for thirty years Rolli represented the continuum element in cultural relations between "the Italian world of the Arcadia and the English world of the Dunciad".¹⁸ As a pivotal element of the Italian intellectual community in London, he kept direct links with great Italian scholars like Muratori (the most important reference point for all those who, both inside and outside Italy, tried to develop and promote Italian culture) and poets like Metastasio.

The last period of Rolli's stay in England was not a happy one. At all times he had felt himself to be a foreigner in a strange land but, as time went on, after completing the translation of *Paradise Lost*, this uneasiness became real despair. In a letter to Riva, who had been promoted to a higher post in Vienna, Rolli wrote on 3rd June, 1735:

Sono stanchissimo di questo Fango, e fumo, e umidaccio eterni, dove non è facile ad onesto et abile Forastiero far fortuna neppure mediocrissima, e bisogna spender molto per vivere non da bestia, per non far debito & essere obbligato a far il Ministro per proprio scampo, e in conseguenza misera Figura.¹⁹

In 1736 he again wrote to Riva, asking him to use whatever influence he could to get him appointed at the emperor's court as Zeno's successor. But Metastasio had long since been settled upon for that post, and Rolli's hopes of any concrete possibility of competing against him were soon ruled out.

¹⁷ Cfr. P. Rolli, "Letter to the readers" in *Satire e Rime* di M. Ludovico Ariosto, Londra, per Giovanni Pickard, 1716, p.2110.

¹⁸ Cfr. G.E. Dorris, op.cit., p.10.

¹⁹ Quoted ibidem, p.153.

Rolli's departure from England marked the end of his group; the disruption of Rolli's Italian circle in London was so radical that no points of contacts could be established with it by Rolli's successor as apologist for Italian letters in England, Giuseppe Baretti. The friend of Dr. Johnson belonged to a different generation and a different age from that of Rolli, one that took for granted the accomplishments of Arcadia, and could therefore react against its decline: the age of Alfieri and revolution, rather than that of Metastasio and absolutism.²⁰ However, despite the lack of continuity, Baretti found himself in the same antagonistic position as Rolli against Voltaire and in favour of Shakespeare. Through their action great successive steps were made in the parallel process of liberation from the French cultural yoke and increased knowledge of Shakespeare's work in Italy. It must be recognized that it was no small achievement on Rolli and Baretti's part to have defied the greatest polemicist of the age and to have emerged with some honour from this battle. It is not surprising, on the other hand, that this was accomplished by the first two Italians (apart from Conti's mixed feelings towards Shakespeare) who had a really deep appreciation and understanding of Shakespeare.

As mentioned before,²¹ Rolli's battle against Voltaire first started with his remarks on the latter's essay on epic poetry. In his essay, Rolli attacked Voltaire's judgments on various Italian authors and also examined, for the first time in Italy, Voltaire's epic poem *Henriade*. He found it lacked invention while at the same time being strangely crowded with "la Lubricità, la Religione, la Discordia, l'Amore, il Papa, i Profeti, l'Inquisizione, l'Inferno". Rolli was surprised to see that while Voltaire in his essay blamed the Italian epic poets for mixing Christian ideas and pagan mythology, in his own epic poem he had put in "Marte per la guerra, Imeneo per il matrimonio, (...) una spada immersa, nelle acque infernali di Temi (...)".

²⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, p. 157.

²¹ Cfr. *supra*, p. 40, footnote no. 10, "The era of translations".

On the whole, Rolli was able to find a number of inconsistencies and errors in the essay and Voltaire's reaction was quite reasonable;²² he took all of Rolli's suggestions and corrections into consideration when revising the essay for the French public, so that the final version was quite different from the first.²³ This meant "conceding a victory seldom won against the great Frenchman".²⁴

When Rolli finally went back to Italy in the quiet retirement of his home town Todi, he only produced (along with a small collection of poems) one last work there, which was published posthumously in 1776. This was a collection of bitter satirical epigrams on London life under the title Marziale in Albion, and it is not difficult to trace its origin back to Rolli's feelings of discomfort and weariness during his last years in England. Although the circumstances of his past life (the long stay in heretical lands, the classical/pagan flavour of his poetry, the publication of Marchetti's translation of a "fiendish" author like Lucretius, his interest in the "arch-heretic" Milton, as well as in the "barbarian" Shakespeare) did not put him in the best of lights in papal Italy, he deeply enjoyed Todi's quiet life and beautiful climate. The peaceful contemplative mood of his last years is reflected in the following passage from his poem "Ad Aglauro":

Or non respiro aer umido e freddo e denso fumo;
ma di colli a cui dier l'utili piante
Bacco, Cerere, Pallade e Pomona,
l'aria leggera sott'azzurro cielo.²⁵

²² Voltaire's "vis polemica", however, could not be entirely absent on this occasion and in a letter to J. Vernet, dated "14 Septembre 1733", in a witty categorization of poets and non-poets, he managed to list Rolli among the latter: "qui concque escrit en vers doit ecrire en beaux vers, ou ne sera point lu. Les poetes ne reussissent que par les beautes de detail; sans cela Virgile et Chapelain, Racine et Campistron, Milton et Ogilbi (John Ogilby), le Tasse et Rolli seraient egaux". Cfr. The Complete Works of Voltaire, ed. T. Besterman, Correspondence 86, II, 1730-1734, Institut et Musée Voltaire, University of Toronto Press, 1969.

²³ For a detailed discussion of the changes made by Voltaire in the light of Rolli's criticism, cfr. S. Fassini, op.cit., pp.83-99. Cfr. also an appendix following the above article in which Fassini publishes a letter to the Pope's legate in Vienna, Domenico Passionei, in which, rather triumphalistically, Rolli boasts of his victory over Voltaire as follows: "Lo sconsiderato Voltaire ci assalì in questa metropoli, scrivendo in lingua inglese, ma sentì contanto pungersi nella stessa lingua da me ch'ebbe tosto a pentirsene per l'inaspettata ripercossa e non ardì far replica alcuna." p.99.

²⁴ Cfr. G.E. Dorris, p.198-199. Cfr. in pp.198-203 a very thorough comment on Rolli's essay and his controversy with Voltaire.

²⁵ Quoted by W. Binni, "La letteratura nell'epoca arcadico-razionalista", op.cit., p.404.

Voltaire

It is a well-known paradox in European literary history that Voltaire has been the strongest supporter of classicist dramatic rules and at the same time the greatest contributor to the spread of Shakespeare's popularity all over Europe.¹ An equally well-known fact is Voltaire's contradictory attitude towards an author he had made known outside England for the first time, carried away by enthusiasm on first discovering him², but whom he criticized for his faults and whom, as time went on, he attacked more and more violently.

Voltaire formed his views on Shakespeare just after his friend Pope had published his edition of Shakespeare's works in 1725, and was strongly influenced by Pope's critical approach, according to which Shakespeare affords "the most numerous as well as the most conspicuous instances, both of Beauties and Faults of all sorts" and in his work "many of the Parts are childish, ill-plac'd and unequal to its grandeur".³ This "Beauties-Faults"

¹ In his first Lecture, read by D'Alembert at the Académie Française on 25th August 1776,

Voltaire reminded the distinguished audience that he himself, half a century earlier, had been the first Frenchman to learn English, the first to introduce Shakespeare to the continent and to translate him, the first to make known Pope, Dryden and Milton, even the first who had dared to explain the great Newton, and do justice to the profound wisdom of Locke. All these claims are perfectly justified. A substantial treatise could be and should be written on Voltaire's contribution to the dissemination of English thought and English literature.

Cfr. "Voltaire on Shakespeare", ed. T. Besterman, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century. Vol.LIV, Institut et Musée Voltaire, Genève, 1967, "Introduction", p.14.

² During his stay in London as an exile Voltaire became an assiduous spectator of Shakespeare's plays in the 1726-27 season. This experience had a strong emotional impact on him, which never faded completely. As A.M. Rosseau observes in the introduction to his edition of Voltaire, La Mort de César, Paris, 1964, p.7-8:

(...) sans lecture préalable ou préparation aucune (...) il le découvre in vivo (...). Cette brutale révélation, cette Epiphanie (...) quels que fussent (...) les réserves ou revirements du lecteur ou du patriote ne s'effaceront jamais, pesant souvent d'un poids presque charnel dans les balances de la froide critique.

³ Quoted by T. Besterman, op.cit. "Introduction", pp.24-25. Cfr. also in this connection P.S. Conklin, op.cit., pp.45-46:

The "Beauties-Faults" type of criticism is a distinct eighteenth century genre. It can be said to owe its origin, partly to the separatist tendency that reduced the dramatic texture to a "series of deep reflections"; and partly to another neo-classical habit, the pointing out in Shakespeare of a number of "defects", most of them violations of decorum. The "beauty-blemish cant" as one writer calls it, is plainly evident in Dryden and Dennis, for example; and many traces of it are found throughout the Eighteenth century.

approach was later to be popularized by Voltaire throughout Europe, and especially Italy⁴, where the literary world was only too ready to accept Voltaire's views uncritically.

For the purposes of the present study, it is to be noted that Voltaire arrived in England approximately ten years after Conti and Rolli, but he was the one who played by far the most influential role in making Shakespeare known outside England. However, as already mentioned, Voltaire's opinion on Shakespeare was certainly influenced by Conti⁵ in some way, while Rolli⁶ engaged polemical discussions with him not only on Shakespearian but also on Italian literary matters. In the second part of the century, Baretti became Voltaire's harshest Italian enemy on behalf of Shakespeare⁷, whereas Verri⁸, who shared many of Voltaire's theoretical ideas, criticized his attacks on Shakespeare in a much calmer tone than Baretti.

With regard to Voltaire's other Italian connections, it is interesting to note that Voltaire's writings on Shakespeare were often linked with Italian men of letters and this probably increased their appeal and popularity in Italy. Voltaire's tragedy Sémiramis, with its important preface⁹ containing a virulent attack on Hamlet was dedicated to the translator of his epic poem Henriade, and director of the Vatican Library Cardinal Quirini.¹⁰ This preface must immediately have become bedside reading for every Italian scholar, if we judge from the innumerable contemporary references to it. The rewriting of his other

⁴Cfr. A. Lombardo, art. cit., p.2: "Voltaire costituisce un momento essenziale della "fortuna" del drammaturgo; anche all'Italia, come a tutta l'Europa Voltaire da un lato impone, col peso della sua influenza e della sua autorità, l'opera shakespeariana, dall'altro traccia gli schemi entro i quali, fino al Romanticismo si muoverà la critica."

⁵ Cfr. supra, pp.54-55, "Milestones".

⁶ Cfr. supra, pp.60-62, "Conti and Rolli", pp.69-70, "Milestones".

⁷ Cfr. supra, p.62, "Milestones", p.69, "Conti and Rolli", pp.90-103 infra "Baretti".

⁸ Cfr. infra p.142, "Verri's Unpublished Translation".

⁹ For a detailed account of this preface cfr. infra pp.79-80.

¹⁰Cfr. infra p.94, note 182. The preface began as follows: "Monseigneur, il était digne d'un génie tel que le votre, et d'un homme qui est à la tête de la plus ancienne bibliothèque du monde, de vous donner tout entier aux lettres. (...) mais si tous les lettrés vous doivent de la reconnaissance, je vous en dois plus que personne, après l'honneur que vous m'avez fait de traduire en si beaux vers la Henriade et le Poème de Fontenay."

tragedy Ervphile ("vêtue à la grecque, corrigée avec soin") was dedicated to the Italian Abate Franchini.¹¹

Another Italian lifelong friend and correspondent was Francesco Algarotti, who met Voltaire on his first visit in Paris as a young man.¹² Algarotti who subsequently gained a very high international reputation through his long stays abroad (Germany, Russia, England) was a classic example of the brilliant cosmopolitan Italian intellectual of the age. A letter by Algarotti to Abate Franchini on the subject of Voltaire's la Mort de César was put "au devant de cette tragédie" ¹³ as a sort of reinforcement to Voltaire's ideas.

Algarotti's original letter contained this comment: "In questa tragedia il Voltaire ha preso a imitare la severità del teatro inglese e singolarmente Shakespeare in cui dicesi, e con ragione, che ci sono errori innumerabili e pensieri inimitabili".¹⁴ When Algarotti happened to attend a performance of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar in London the following year, his approach to Shakespeare became more personal, as is evident from a letter he wrote on 22nd June 1757 to Muzio Spada in Padua, in which he shows a remarkable preference for the English way of tackling Roman themes in comparison with Corneille's:

...si direbbe che le memorie particolari che trovò il Cornelio sopra i Romani erano scritte in lingua spagnola. E punto non mi maraviglio che Sertorio e Cesare a lei

¹¹Writing in private, as wittily as usual, Voltaire gave the following reason for his dedications: "J'aime à dédier mes ouvrages à des étrangers pour ce que c'est toujours une occasion toute naturelle de parler un peu des sottises (sic) de mes compatriotes" Cfr. Letter to "M. Thériot, vers le 10 mai 1733", in Voltaire, Correspondence II, 1730-1734, T. Besterman ed., Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire Vol.86, Genève 1969, pp.381.

¹²Voltaire's feelings about him are well described in another letter to M. Thériot, dated "ce 3 novembre 1735:" "(...)Nous avons ici le marquis Argalotti (sic) jeune homme qui sait les langues et les mœurs de tous les pays, qui fait des vers comme l'Arioste, et qui sait son Loke (sic) et son Newton. Il nous lit des dialogues qu'il a faits sur des parties intéressantes de la philosophie. (...) Nous lisons quelques chants de Jeanne la pucelle, ou une tragédie de ma façon (...). De là nous revenons à Newton et à Loke, non sans vin de Champagne, et sans excellante chère, car nous sommes des philosophes très voluptueux..." Cfr. Ibidem, Vol.87, pp.592.593.

¹³It was actually a French adaptation for propaganda purposes of the original letter in Italian which was much shorter, more familiar in tone and also less laudatory, dated 12 December 1735. Cfr. A.M. Rousseau, ed., op.cit., p.13.

¹⁴Cfr. the French modified version: "M. de Voltaire a imité en quelques endroits, Shakespeare, poète anglais, qui a réuni dans la même pièce les puérilités les plus ridicules et les morceaux les plus sublimes; il en a fait le même usage que Virgile faisait des ouvrages d'Ennius: il a imité de l'auteur anglais les deux dernières scènes, qui sont le plus beaux modèles d'éloquence qu'il y ait au théâtre." Cfr. Lettre de M. Algarotti à M. l'Abbé Franchini, envoyé de Florence à Paris, sur la tragédie de Jules César par M. De Voltaire, quoted by A.M. Rousseau op.cit., p.43.

pajano così poco romani, come la parrucca ch'e' portano, e quel loro cappello colle piume. Fatto sta che la virtù romana dovea negli scritti del Cornelio prender quella tintura di galanteria e di eroismo che dominava nel suo secolo (...). All'incontro, i veri sentimenti romani debbono assai facilmente innestarsi nelle anime inglesi, poco o niente rammollite dalla galanteria, nudrite di spettacoli anzi feroci che no, e use in un governo quasi sempre fortunato e che ha molta analogia con la Repubblica Romana.¹⁵

He also added a few passages of Brutus' speech in act III scene 2 translated into Italian, to prove his conviction that Shakespeare's words exactly suited Brutus' character.¹⁶ However, far from realizing in what Shakespeare's true originality consisted, he went on praising Addison's Cato as the finest example of the greatness of English theatre (quite a commonplace among Italian men of letters). Another Italian also connected with Shakespearian matters as a friend of Voltaire's was the Bolognese marquis Francesco Albergati Capacelli, the famous amateur actor and manager who had set up his own theatre in his fabulous country seat at Zola.¹⁷ Voltaire who admired him for his overwhelming theatrical passion called him "le Garrick d'Italie". A mention by Voltaire of his translation of Julius Caesar is contained in a letter to Capacelli dated "4 juin 1762", running as follows:

(...) L'Etat où j'ai été et où je suis encor ne m'a pas permis de mettre la dernière main à la Tragédie que j'ai fait essayer sur mon théâtre. Je compte avoir l'honneur de vous l'envoyer dès que j'aurai pu y travailler. Il a fallu m'occuper des commentaires sur Corneille. J'y ai joint une traduction en vers blancs de la Tragédie de Shakespear, intitulée la mort de César,¹⁸ que je compare avec le Cinna de Corneille, parce-que dans l'une et dans l'autre pièce le sujet est une conspiration. J'ai traduit Shakespear vers pour vers; je peux vous assurer que c'est l'extravagance la plus grossière qu'on puisse lire. Gilles et Scarmouche sont beaucoup plus raisonnables.¹⁹

¹⁵Cfr. Illuministi italiani, a c.d. E. Bonora, Tomo II, Opere di F. Algarotti, Vol.46, p.560, Ricciardi, Napoli, 1949, pp.559-560.

¹⁶For the translation and comments on it cfr. A.M. Crinò, op.cit., p.58-59.

¹⁷He was especially entitled to occupy the first place in Voltaire's gratitude as the foremost translator, actor and impresario of his tragedies cfr. E. Bouvy, op.cit., p.234-235. Moreover, he was a classic example of the Frenchified Italian intellectual, particularly plagiarized by Voltaire with regard to Shakespeare. In this connection he wrote: "Si vuol fra gli inglesi divinizzare Shakespeare per quelle sue composizioni teatrali (...). Sia lodato Shakespeare; sia egli ammirato. Ma a quelle sue commedie e tragedie non si potrà intervenire che o sbadigliando, o dormendo, o fischando." (quoted by Ortolani G., "Goldoni e Shakespeare", Rivista Italiana del Dramma, 15.5.1940, p.285).

¹⁸Voltaire is probably mixing up his own title with Shakespeare's here.

¹⁹Cfr. The Complete Works of Voltaire, ed. T. Besterman, Vol.XXV, D10483, Banbury, 1973, p.11.

He was to repeat the same information in his Avertissement du Traducteur prefaced to the text of "Jules César, tragédie en 3 actes de Shakespeare traduite par Voltaire", also adding the following general ideas on translation:

On peut traduire un poète en exprimant seulement le fond de ses pensées; mais, pour le bien faire connaître, pour donner une idée juste de sa langue, il faut traduire non seulement ses pensées, mais tous les accessoires. Si le poète a employé une métaphore, il ne faut pas lui substituer une autre métaphore; s'il se sert d'un mot qui soit bas dans sa langue, on doit le rendre par un mot qui soit bas dans la nôtre. C'est un tableau dont il faut copier exactement l'ordonnance, les attitudes, le coloris, les défauts et les beautés, sans quoi vous donnez votre ouvrage pour le sien.

He then quotes an example from the French translation of Othello criticizing it because all the bawdy images have been cut:

Je ne dis pas que le traducteur ait mal fait d'épargner à nos yeux la lecture de ce morceau; je dis seulement qu'il n'a pas fait connaître Shakespeare, et qu'on ne peut deviner quel est le génie de cet auteur, celui de son temps, celui de sa langue, par les imitations qu'on nous en a données sous le nom de traduction. Il n'y a pas six lignes de suite dans le Jules César français qui se trouvent dans le César anglais. La traduction qu'on donne ici de ce César est la plus fidèle qu'on ait jamais faite en notre langue d'un poète ancien ou étranger.

Voltaire here sounds sincerely convinced of all this, as he probably did not realize that in actual fact he had more or less continued to adopt his old method of using "petits extraits significatifs, isolés en vue d'une démonstration particulière".²⁰ In 1763 even when tackling a considerable task such as the translation of a complete Shakespeare play (with the support of the Pope-Warburton edition), his omissions amounted to no less than two acts and a half, and the point is that these omissions were instrumental to his declared intention to devalue Shakespeare in comparison with Corneille.²¹ It is clear then that the "pontifex maximus" of European culture was still very far from the conception of a faithful complete

²⁰Cfr. A.M. Rousseau, op.cit., p.30.

²¹One of the many parallels between the two authors can be found in a letter to M. de Cideville, dated "3 Novembre 1735" accompanying the translation of the last scene of Julius Caesar, which, he explains, is "une traduction assez fidèle d'un auteur anglais qui vivoit il y a cent cinquante ans. C'est Shakespeare, le Corneille de Londres, grand fou d'ailleurs et ressemblant plus souvent à Gilles qu'à Corneille. Mais il a des morceaux admirables." Cfr. Voltaire, Correspondence I, 1704-1738, T. Besterman ed., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard 1963, pp.591-592. Another parallel showing how far Voltaire was influenced by class-consciousness is in the "Observations sur le Jules César de Shakespeare", A.M. Rousseau, op.cit., p.192: "Il (Corneille) était inégal comme Shakespeare, et plein de génie comme lui; mais le génie de Corneille était à celui de Shakespeare ce qu'un seigneur est à l'égard d'un homme du peuple né avec le même esprit que lui."

translation of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, such as the one which an obscure Senese professor, Domenico Valentini, had already attempted in 1756.

Voltaire's connection with Shakespeare started in 1727, with his essay on epic poetry²² and was to last approximately half a century. No other English writer was mentioned as often as Shakespeare in Voltaire's works and correspondence, almost to the brink of obsession. When Shakespeare's growing success (ironically stimulated by his own writings) started to release in Voltaire a reaction of systematic abuse and misinterpretations, Hamlet was to be the most frequent target of Voltaire's increasingly violent attacks.²³

In the English editions of the essay, Voltaire's position towards Shakespeare was a very favourable one. He expressed a theory based on national taste and customs: each particular people or climate produces its own particular form of art, which cannot be judged or rejected but only accepted by the foreign reader. This very liberal conception (which was to trigger an irreversible movement of opinion in favour of Shakespeare), was to become more diluted and problematic already in 1733, in the French translation of the essay²⁴ and to be gradually abandoned in later years.

²²Cfr. Voltaire, Essay on the Epick Poetry of all the European Nations from Homer down to Milton, London, 1727.

²³Theodore Besterman, the most well-known editor of Voltaire's works, provides the following interesting explanation for Voltaire's complex feelings about Hamlet:

Voltaire cannot but have perceived the Racinian quality of Hamlet, and he must have been all the more scandalized by its profoundly Shakespearian interpretation of so "classical" a treatment. And I think this explains why he came back again and again to Hamlet, loading Shakespeare's tragedy with exacerbated insults and high if reluctant praise.

The Racinian quality according to Besterman consists in concentrating the focus of the play primarily on the workings of Hamlet's mind in the same way as in Phèdre it is concentrated on the heroine's guilt feelings about her love. But Shakespeare's method is crucially different from Racine's, inasmuch as:

Shakespeare presents a mighty human problem, which is not resolved on the stage any more than it would be in life, a psychological enigma (...) The performance of a Shakespeare tragedy is a collaboration between author and spectator: is not that the secret of Shakespeare's appeal to every generation and to all peoples? Beyond the footlights of Phèdre the audience is asked only to look and listen. Racine does all its thinking and feeling for it. (Cfr. T. Besterman, Voltaire, New York 1969, p.136, quoted by E. Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia, New York, 1969, p.31)

Besterman's conclusion is that there is nothing surprising in the fact that Voltaire objected so strongly to Shakespeare. On the contrary: "What is surprising is that he, with his Jesuit education, his boundless admiration for Racine, and his immutable canons of 'good taste' should have found any merit at all in Shakespeare." (Cfr. *ibidem*, p.139)

²⁴ Cfr. Voltaire Oeuvres Complètes, ed. L. Moland "Essai sur la Poésie Epique", Tome 8, Garnier, Paris, 1877 (Reprint 1967) pp.305-363.

With regard to Hamlet, in 1734, in his memorable 18th "lettre philosophique" ²⁵ Voltaire's opinion on the play was still a fairly generous one, even though the gravediggers' scene is violently castigated:

Vous n'ignorez pas que dans Hamlet des fossoyeurs creusent une fosse en buvant, en chantant des vaudevilles & en faisant sur les têtes de morts qu'ils reçoivent des plaisanteries convenables à gens de leur métier, mais ce qui vous surprendra c'est qu'on a imité ces sottises sous le règne de Charles Second, qui étoit celui de la politesse, & l'âge d'or des beaux-arts.

He recognizes that it is surprising that up to then nobody has "traduit aucun de ces endroits frapans qui demandent grâce pour toutes ses fautes" and affirms that "il est bien aisé de rapporter en prose les erreurs d'un poète, mais très-difficile de traduire ses beaux vers." As an example of "beaux vers" he offers his own translation of Hamlet's "To be" soliloquy, "qui est sçu de tout le monde" which, however, is to be considered, as all translations are, only "une foible estampe d'un beau tableau". After quoting his translation, he reaffirms that he has not translated "mot pour mot" and fulminates: "malheur aux faiseurs de traductions littérales, qui en traduisant chaque parole énervent le sens. C'est bien là qu'on peut dire que la lettre tue & que l'esprit vivifie". The translation of Hamlet's set speech is perfectly in line with Voltaire's conviction that it is:

dans ces morceaux détachés que les tragiques Anglais ont jusqu'ici excellé: leurs pièces presque toutes barbares, dépourvues de bienséance, d'ordre, de vraisemblance, ont des lueurs étonnantes au milieu de cette nuit.

In Voltaire's translation Hamlet comes out as an 18th century anticlerical rationalist, whose words can be given a twist most congenial to "this arch deist of the Enlightenment";²⁶

HAMLET:
O mort! moment fatal! Affreuse éternité!
Tout cœur à ton seul nom se glace épouvanté.
Eh qui pourroit sans toi supporter cette vie;
De nos Prêtres menteurs benir l'hypocrisie;

Further down the translation ends with these lines:

²⁵Cfr. his over-famous and over-repeated judgment contained in it: "un génie plein de force & de fécondité, de naturel & de sublime, sans la moindre étincelle de bon goût & sans la moindre connoissance des règles", Voltaire, Œuvres philosophiques, ed. G. Lanson, Paris, 1924, Tome II, p.79-88.

²⁶Cfr. P.S. Conklin, op.cit., p.87.

Mais le scrupule parle et nous crie: Arrêtez;
Il défend à nos mains cet heureux homicide,
Et d'un Héros guerrier, fait un chrétien timide, &c.

But, as P.S. Conklin wittily observes,²⁷ the trouble was that Hamlet could not soliloquize in terms congenial to Voltaire all the time. He also had a tragic mission to perform and a supposed madness to carry out, and all this could not be accomplished within the rules of decorum prescribed for French classical tragedy.

However, towards 1736 Voltaire was still hesitant between the national taste theory and another one according to which Shakespeare was seen as a powerful primitive genius providing a dangerous, but very stimulating model, a "diamant brut" which had to be polished in order that its beauties might be seen, that is to say in order to make it possible to "transporter sur la scène française certaines beautés de la scène anglaise".²⁸

With the publication in 1746 of La Place's translations, Shakespeare was increasingly gaining favour in France and there was an ever growing demand for information²⁹ which revealed a widespread desire for a clearer and better knowledge about him. This new interest signalled a change in taste, a need for a stronger emotional stimulation than could be offered by the hitherto unquestioned arid rationalism of the age. The same emotional appetite that was being expressed by the graveyard and Ossian poems in England, was also to appear in France in the sixties and find an outlet in the treatment of melancholy and sepulchral subjects, while another related tendency was the appreciation for wildness and irregularity. Exactly all these elements could be found in Shakespeare and consequently his

²⁷Ibidem, p.88.

²⁸This attitude was reflected in the Discours de Réception à l'Académie Française in 1746, where a key point was the following:

Et quand je dis ici, Messieurs que ce sont les grands poètes qui ont déterminé le génie des langues, je n'avance rien qui ne soit connu de vous. Les Grecs n'écrivirent l'histoire que quatre cents ans après Homère. La langue grecque reçut de ce grand peintre de la nature la supériorité qu'elle prit chez tous les peuples de l'Asie et de l'Europe: c'est Térence qui, chez les Romains, parla le premier avec une pureté toujours élégante; c'est Pétrarque qui, après le Dante, donna à la langue italienne cette aménité et cette grace qu'elle a toujours conservées; c'est à Lope de Vega que l'espagnol doit sa noblesse et sa pompe; c'est Shakespeare qui, tout barbare qu'il était, mit dans l'anglais cette force et cette énergie qu'on n'a jamais pu augmenter depuis sans l'outrer, et par conséquent sans l'affaiblir. (Cfr. Voltaire, Mélanges. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961, pp.243-244.)

²⁹In the first volume of Diderot and D'Alembert's Encyclopédie published in 1751, Shakespeare was mentioned several times; in Le Nouveau Dictionnaire Historique in 1756, there were six pages on him.

popularity went on increasing. Moreover, a strong emphasis was going to be put on them through the coming fashion for the sanguinary and horrid performances of Shakespeare's travesties, which "assouvissaient un profond besoin de pathétique (...). Bientôt Shakespeare sera (...) exploité pour des drames grand-guignolesques, noirs et gothiques à souhait."³⁰ For the first time those very characteristics which had been exposed by Voltaire as absolutely negative, began to be considered positive and even necessary in a work of genius. As P.S. Conklin³¹, remarks, "the work of génie must have 'l'air irrégulier, escarpé, sauvage'. It was not new to say that Shakespeare had these qualities. Voltaire had already said much the same thing. It was novel, however, to imply a genuine admiration for Shakespeare because of them."

As Voltaire gradually realized the kind of process he had set in motion, his animus against Shakespeare deepened and he launched another attack against him in the essay prefacing his tragedy Sémiramis.³² Again his attack was centred on Hamlet, although he acknowledged he had been inspired by it in creating the ghost of Ninus in Sémiramis (which was an unheard-of innovation in contemporary French tragedy). However he hastens to add:

Je suis bien loin assurément de justifier en tout la tragédie d'Hamlet: c'est une pièce grossière et barbare qui ne serait pas supportée par la plus vile populace de la France et de l'Italie. Hamlet y devient fou au second acte, et sa maîtresse devient folle au troisième; le prince tue le père de sa maîtresse, feignant de tuer un rat, et l'héroïne se jette dans la rivière. On fait sa fosse sur le théâtre; des fossoyeurs disent des quolibets dignes d'eux, en tenant dans leurs mains des têtes de morts; le prince Hamlet répond à leurs grossieretés abominables par des folies non moins dégoûtantes. (...) On croirait que cet ouvrage est le fruit de l'imagination d'un sauvage ivre.

Surprisingly, the conclusion is:

Mais parmi ces irrégularités grossières, qui rendent encore aujourd'hui le théâtre anglais si absurde et si barbare, on trouve dans Hamlet, par une bizarrerie encore plus

³⁰ Cfr. A.M. Rousseau, op.cit., p.20.

³¹ Cfr. P.S. Conklin, op.cit., p.89.

³² Cfr. Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire, "Théâtre", Tome 3ème, Garnier, 1877, Paris, pp.501-503. "Dissertation sur la Tragédie ancienne et moderne" Troisième Partie, (1748). It was published with Sémiramis and dedicated to "S. Em. Mgr Le Cardinal Quirini, noble vénitien, Eveque de Brescia, Bibliothécaire du Vatican"; it is interesting to note that in this same essay Voltaire made the apology of Italian musical drama and of Metastasio, its most famous contemporary practitioner. Cfr. E. Bouvy, op.cit., p.206-207.

Mais parmi ces irregularités grossières, qui rendent encore aujourd'hui le théâtre anglais si absurde et si barbare, on trouve dans Hamlet, par une bizarrerie encore plus grande, des traits sublimes, dignes des plus grands génies. Il semble que la nature se soit plu à rassembler dans la tête de Shakespeare ce qu'on peut imaginer de plus fort et de plus grand, avec ce que la grossièreté sans esprit peut avoir de plus bas et de plus détestable.

As this essay is written during the phase in which Voltaire still concedes that Hamlet possesses an appeal for him, he is, though unwillingly, led to confess that:

parmi les beautés qui étincellent au milieu de ces terribles extravagances, l'ombre du père d'Hamlet est un des coups de théâtre les plus frappants. Il fait toujours un grand effet sur les Anglais, je dis sur ceux qui sont les plus instruits et qui sentent le mieux toute l'irrégularité de leur ancien théâtre.

He admires this scene so much that he considers it superior to a similar one in Aeschylus, and attributes its extraordinary effect to the fact that in Shakespeare the ghost has a very definite function:

l'ombre du père d'Hamlet vient demander vengeance, vient révéler des crimes secrets: elle n'est ni inutile, ni amenée par force; elle sert à convaincre qu'il y a un pouvoir invisible qui est le maître de la nature.

Voltaire finds this a very clever device, inspiring satisfaction and pleasure to the audience because it shows that there exists a supreme Being concerned with punishing crimes otherwise secret to men: "c'est une consolation pour le faible, c'est un frein pour le pervers qui est puissant."³³

This stage of partial admiration was to end in 1760 when the publication of the anonymous reviews of two English pamphlets aroused Voltaire's indignation as well as the sense that things were really going too far. The articles, appeared in Le Journal encyclopédique, were entitled Parallèle entre Shakespeare et Corneille (15.10.1760) and Parallèle entre Otway et Racine (1.11.1760) Shakespeare was mentioned in them as "un grand génie poétique" who could not be submitted to rules, while Corneille could as he was

³³Cfr. A.M. Rousseau, op.cit., p.15: "...Voltaire, en tous temps très sensible au charme exercé sur lui par Shakespeare, tempéra toujours une admiration réelle de réserves, équitables et prudentes jusqu'en 1760 environ, de plus en plus acerbes et injustes, voire absurdes, ensuite, quoique toujours en pleine connaissance de cause."

only "un excellent poète dramatique". That was really too much and Voltaire set forth to destroy Shakespeare's reputation in his Appel à toutes les nations de l'Europe (1761)³⁴

In this famous "Appel" Voltaire summons the European nations ("Nous nous adressons donc à tous les lecteurs depuis Pétersbourg jusqu'à Naples.") to give a judgment on the rival theatres of France and England personified in Corneille and Shakespeare. After a heavily allusive remark on the fact that of course Corneille is known all over Europe and Shakespeare is not, Voltaire offers the necessary information about him, saying: "il faut mettre les pièces du procès sur le bureau". Therefore, he will give a "faithful" account of one of Shakespeare's most admired plays: Hamlet. The account is given in a uniformly disparaging tone by means of ridicule in order to emphasize the disgraceful commonness and vulgarity of the story.³⁵ Besides, some passages are ironically indicated as being particularly recommended by Pope (the ghost's disappearance at the singing of the cock at dawn with the ensuing discussion of the guards, Hamlet's soliloquy "Frailty, thy name is woman" and Hamlet's missed opportunity of killing Claudius).

The next point raised by Voltaire is a question about how Shakespeare was able to invent so many marvellous stories and Voltaire's answer is that he found his subjects ready made from ancient Roman history or, in the case of Hamlet, from "Saxon le grammairien, à qui gloire soit rendue". As to the pleasure these plays seem to give the English audiences,

³⁴ Cfr. Voltaire, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. L. Moland, Tome 24, Mélanges, Garnier Paris, 1879 (Reprint 1967), pp.192-205. As T. Besterman, "Voltaire on Shakespeare", *op.cit.*, p.17, observes, in this essay Voltaire

first declared open war on the tendency, then just becoming fashionable, to praise everything English at the expense of everything French, particularly in literature, and still more precisely on the stage. It must at least be owned that nobody in France had better earned the right to make such a protest against Anglomania, since it was chiefly he who had caused the pendulum to swing from Anglophobia (...).

³⁵ A single example is enough to show the kind of technique Voltaire is using: the "What's Hecuba to him" speech is rendered as follows:

Quoi, dit-il, un comédien vient de pleurer pour Hécube! Et qu'est-ce que lui est Hécube? Que ferait-il donc si son oncle et sa mère avaient empoisonné son père, comme Claudius et Gertrude ont empoisonné le mien? Ah! maudit empoisonneur, assassin, putassier! traître, débauché, indigne vilain! Et moi, quel âne je suis! N'est-il pas vraiment brave à moi, moi le fils d'un roi empoisonné, moi à qui le ciel et l'enfer demandent vengeance, de me borner à exhaler ma douleur en paroles comme une putain? que je m'en tienne à des malédictions comme une vraie salope, comme une gueuse, un torchon de cuisine! (p.197)

Voltaire attributes it to their vulgarity. But, at this point, the old charm hits again, and almost against his will Voltaire has to admit:

Quelques traits de génie, quelques vers heureux, pleins de naturel et de force, et qu'on retient par coeur malgré qu'on en ait, ont demandé grâce pour le reste, et bientôt toute la pièce a fait fortune, à l'aide de quelques beautés de détail. (p.201)

Voltaire then takes up the subject of translations ("sont-elles fidèles?"); no, his own translation of Hamlet's monologue of nearly thirty years before, through which he introduced Shakespeare in France for the first time, was not. He quotes it again,³⁶ but this time it is followed by a new absolutely literal one:

Etre ou n'être pas, c'est là la question,
S'il est plus noble dans l'esprit de souffrir
Les piqûres et les flèches de l'affreuse fortune,
Ou de prendre les armes contre une mer de trouble,
Et en s'opposant à eux, les finir? Mourir, dormir,
Rien de plus; et par ce sommeil, dire: Nous terminons
Les peines du coeur, et dix mille chocs naturels
Dont la chair est héritière; c'est une consommation
Ardemment désirable. Mourir, dormir:
Dormir! peut-être rêver! Ah! voilà le mal.
Car, dans ce sommeil de la mort, quels rêves aura-t-on,
Quand on a dépouillé cette enveloppe mortelle?
C'est là ce qui fait penser: c'est là la raison
Qui donne à la calamité une vie si longue.
Car qui voudrait supporter les coups, et les injures du temps,
Les torts de l'oppresseur, les dédains de l'orgueilleux,
Les angoisses d'un amour méprisé, les délais de la justice,
L'insolence des grandes places, et les rebuts
Que le mérite patient essuie de l'homme indigne?
Quand il peut faire son quietus
Avec une simple aiguille à tête! Qui voudrait porter ces fardeaux,
Sangloter, suer sous une fatigante vie?
Mais cette crainte de quelque chose après la mort,
Ce pays ignoré, des bornes duquel
Nul voyageur ne revient, embarrasse la volonté,
Et nous fait supporter les maux que nous avons
Plutôt que de courir vers d'autres que nous ne connaissons pas:
Ainsi la conscience fait des poltrons de nous tous;
Ainsi la couleur naturelle de la résolution
Est ternie par les pâles teintes de la pensée;
Et les entreprises les plus importantes,

³⁶This is, however, a more domesticated version in which "nos fourbes puissants" replaces "nos Prêtres menteurs". The translation was published once more in 1764, in a modified version of the Appel entitled "Du Théâtre Anglais par Jérôme Carré: Plan de la Tragédie d'Hamlet", in Contes de Guillaume Vadé and, finally, included in Questions sur l'Encyclopédie (1770) with some further changes. In the commentary accompanying the translation the customary insults against Shakespeare were even heavier than usual. He called him: "un Gille de la Foire, un farceur très au-dessous d'Arlequin; le plus misérable bouffon qui ait jamais amusé la populace."

Par ce respect tournent leur courant de travers,
Et perdent leur nom d'action...
(pp.202-203)

This is an interesting experiment on two radically different translation strategies: Voltaire calls his first version "un morceau de poésie" and evidently considers it almost an original creation of his own, while the second one, "cette traduction scrupuleuse" through its "obscurités" and its strict impersonality

découvre (...) le génie de la langue anglaise; son naturel, qui ne craint pas les idées les plus basses, ni les plus gigantesques; son énergie, que d'autres nations croiraient dureté; ses hardiesses, que des esprits peu accoutumés aux tours étrangers prendraient pour du galimatias.
(p.203)

But once more Voltaire is carried away unwittingly by his subconscious memory of the emotions felt as a young French exile in London avidly watching Shakespeare's plays every night:

Mais sous ces voiles on découvrira de la vérité, de la profondeur, et je ne sais quoi qui attache et qui remue beaucoup plus que ne ferait l'élégance; aussi il n'y a presque personne en Angleterre qui ne sache ce monologue par coeur.
(Ibidem)

And again he resumes his theory of the "diamant brut", but this time his attitude is reversed, it should not be polished: "C'est un diamant brut qui a des taches: si on le polissait, il perdrait de son poids". After this moment of sentimental weakness Voltaire rapidly recovers his polemical drive:

Il n'y a peut-être pas un plus grand exemple de la diversité des goûts des nations. Qu'on vienne après cela nous parler des règles d'Aristote, et des trois unités et des bienséances...
(Ibidem)

and he goes on listing the sophisticated dramatic rules of the French classical theatre. At the end of the day, he concludes; "Il est clair qu'on peut enchanter toute une nation sans se donner tant de peines". (Ibidem)

Obsessively, Voltaire renews his attack against Hamlet: in an article of 4.4.1764 in La Gazette Littéraire de l'Europe,³⁷ reviewing a book by Henry Home, Lord Kaims, entitled

³⁷Cfr. Voltaire, op.cit., 1879, Vol.25 Mélanges. pp.160-161.

Elements of Criticism, he criticizes the author for writing that Shakespeare's monologues "sont les seuls modèles à suivre, et qu'il ne connaît rien de si parfait". As an ironic demonstration that things are very different, Voltaire gives a translation of the "Oh that this too too sullied flesh" monologue and protests that the readers will be surprised by Lord Kaims' assertion. In fact:

...quelques Français pourront dire que Gilles, dans une foire de province s'exprimerait avec plus de décence et de noblesse que le prince Hamlet, mais il faut considérer que cette pièce est écrite il y a deux cent ans; que les Anglais n'ont rien de mieux; que le temps a consacré cet ouvrage; et qu'enfin il est bon d'avoir une preuve aussi publique du pouvoir de l'habitude et du respect pour l'antiquité. Le fond du discours d'Hamlet est dans la nature: cela suffit aux Anglais. Le style n'est pas celui de Sophocle et d'Euripide; mais la décence, la noblesse, la justesse des idées, la beauté des vers, l'harmonie, sont peu de chose (...).
(p.161)

Voltaire then examines a line by Racine (Iphigénie, acte 1, scène 1): "Mais tout dort, et l'armée et les vents, et Neptune" which Lord Kaims had criticized as unsuitable for the language of an officer, and scornfully compares it with a line from Hamlet during the changing of the guards, when Francisco answers Bernardo's question if everything is all right, as follows: "Je n'ai pas vu trotter une souris" (act 1, scene 1). This is what Voltaire ironically calls "le beau naturel de Shakespeare" and goes on: "Convenons qu'une tragédie ne peut commencer avec une simplicité plus noble et plus majestueuse. C'est Sophocle tout pur." The final conclusion is:

Au reste, si M. Home est si sévère envers tous nos meilleurs auteurs et si indulgent avec Shakespeare, il faut avouer qu'il ne traite pas mieux Virgile et Horace.
(p.162)

In the final stage of Voltaire's battle against Shakespeare's increasing popularity in the late 1770's, when Letourneur's translations of Shakespeare appeared in 1776 and were greeted with a unanimous success, his rage reached its climax. He had never expected that the French people would grow to like this author who was little more than a gifted and irrational savage and his hero Hamlet, a character who "at best could merely display moments of rationality or surprising sublimity but whose words and actions, the rest of the time, were hardly to be spoken of in polite society".³⁸ Only then did he fully realize how

³⁸Cfr. P.S. Conklin, op.cit., p.90.

imprudent it had been of him to find anything admirable in either Shakespeare or Hamlet and repented bitterly of his initial enthusiasm.

Voltaire gathered then all his forces in his greatest anti-Shakespearian critical effort and wrote the two papers known as Lettres à l'Académie (1776) in which he summarized all the accusations he had been throwing at Shakespeare throughout his immense literary production (including the translation of Julius Caesar which had been meant to devalue Shakespeare's work, setting it in an unfavourable light in comparison with Corneille). He tried to discover and emphasize the coarsest and most vulgar aspects in Shakespeare in an unjust and even at times absurd way and violently attacked Letourneur for rejecting the sacred unities and for his exaltation of the English people and of Shakespeare while he had neglected the French and their theatre.³⁹ Inevitably, Voltaire resumed the subject of Hamlet, very extensively in the first paper (also giving examples from other plays)⁴⁰, while he did not resist the temptation to include a last mention of the hated "fossoyeurs" in the second one.⁴¹

In the first Lettre Voltaire once more relates the plot of Hamlet, giving as usual a caricature of it and emphasizing again (!) the graveyard scene. But this time Voltaire is angrier than ever. The whole Lettre is intended as an attack on Letourneur and "le

³⁹If the tone of the two speeches was impetuous and aggressive enough, it was only when writing in private that Voltaire could fully give vent to his turbulent feelings, as in the following letter to D'Argental: ...il faut que je vous dise combien je suis fâché (...) contre un nommé Tourneur, qu'on dit secrétaire de la librairie, et qui ne me paraît pas le secrétaire du bon goût. Auriez-vous lu les deux volumes de ce misérable dans lesquels il veut nous faire regarder Shakespeare comme le seul modèle de la véritable tragédie? Il l'appelle Dieu du théâtre. Il sacrifie tous les Français sans exception, à son idole, comme on sacrifiait autrefois des cochons à Cérès. Il ne daigne pas même nommer Corneille et Racine (...). Avez-vous une haine assez vigoureuse contre cet impudent imbécile? Souffrirez-vous l'affront qu'il fait à la France? (...) Le sang pétille dans mes vieilles veines, en vous parlant de lui. (...) Ce qu'il y a d'affreux, c'est que le monstre a un parti en France; et, pour comble de calamité et d'horreur, c'est moi qui autrefois parlait le premier de ce Shakespeare; c'est moi le premier qui montrai aux Français quelques perles que j'avais trouvées dans son énorme fumier. Je ne m'attendais pas que je servais un jour à fouler aux pieds les couronnes de Racine et de Corneille pour en orner le front d'un histrion barbare. (Cfr. Voltaire, Lettres choisies, Garnier, Paris, 1963, lettre n.388, p.536-537).

⁴⁰Voltaire, op.cit., Tome 30, 1880 (Lettre de M. de Voltaire à l'Académie Française, lue [...] le 25 Auguste 1776), pp.354-370.

⁴¹Voltaire, op.cit., Tome 7, 1877 (Lettre [nouvelle] à l'Ac.Fr., réplique à Mme Montagu), p.330, published as preface to Voltaire's last tragedy, Irène. On the same topic cfr. infra, p.135.

traducteur" is guilty of a monstrous admiration for this scene, although it had been repeatedly cut in recent years in England. Voltaire quotes approvingly J.F. Marmontel:

On abrège tous les jours Shakespeare, dit-il (Marmontel), on le châtie, le célèbre Garrick vient tout nouvellement de retrancher sur son théâtre la scène des fossoyeurs et presque tout le cinquième acte. La pièce et l'auteur n'en ont été que plus applaudis.⁴²

But all this will not dissuade Letourneur, and to Voltaire's utmost disgust:

Le traducteur ne convient pas de cette vérité; il prend le parti des fossoyeurs. Il veut qu'on les conserve comme le monument respectable d'un génie unique. Il est vrai qu'il y a cent endroits dans cet ouvrage et dans tous ceux de Shakespeare aussi nobles, aussi décents, aussi sublimes, amenés avec autant d'art; mais le traducteur donne la préférence aux fossoyeurs: il se fonde sur ce qu'on a conservé cette abominable scène sur un autre théâtre de Londres; il semble exiger que nous imitions ce beau spectacle. (p.356)

Voltaire then goes on fulminating against Shakespeare's scorn for the unity of place and resorts to the example of Italian theatre to show how Trissino, Rucellai, Tasso and Guarini, "longtemps avant Shakespeare ranimèrent les beaux-arts au commencement du XVIIe siècle" just because they were "fidèles à ces trois grandes lois du bon sens: unité de lieu, unité de temps, unité d'action". In his next mention of Hamlet Voltaire resumes his criticism of Lord Kaimes, who had had the courage to compare the first scene "du monstre nommé Hamlet" with the first scene of Iphigénie. He takes the opportunity here of protesting even more violently than the first time about it, and addressing himself to Lord Kaimes, writes:

Oui, monsieur, un soldat peut répondre ainsi dans un corps de garde; mais non pas sur le théâtre, devant les premières personnes d'une nation, qui s'expriment noblement, et devant qui il faut s'exprimer de même.
Si vous demandez pourquoi ce vers,
Mais tout dort, et l'armée, et les vents, et Neptune,
est d'une beauté admirable, et pourquoi les vers suivants sont plus beaux encore, je vous dirai que c'est parce qu'ils expriment avec harmonie de grandes vérités, qui sont le fondement de la pièce. Je vous dirai qu'il n'y a ni harmonie ni vérité intéressante dans ce quolibet d'un soldat: *Je n'ai pas entendu une souris trotter*. Que ce soldat ait vu on n'ait pas vu passer de souris, cet événement est très-inutile à la tragédie d'*Hamlet*; ce n'est qu'un discours de *Gilles*, un proverbe bas, qui ne peut faire aucun effet. Il y a toujours une raison pour laquelle toute beauté est beauté, et toute sottise est sottise.

⁴²Although an adept of the neoclassical school of criticism, Marmontel was much more open-minded than Voltaire. As early as 1746 he had expressed his appreciation for those resources for moving the spectator not permitted on the French stage (cfr. P.S. Conklin, p.87).

(p.363)

Voltaire's sense of decorum is terribly offended, and as the above passage shows, decorum, taste and elegance are closely connected for him with any cultural and literary achievement⁴³.

He then reinforces his judgment by quoting "le savant Rymer" who, in 1693 had written in his book on tragedy: "il n'y a point de singe en Afrique, point de babouin qui n'ait plus de goût que Shakespeare", and explains his own position as follows:

Permettez-moi, messieurs, de prendre un milieu entre Rymer et le traducteur de Shakespeare, et de ne regarder ce Shakespeare ni comme un dieu, ni comme un singe, mais de vous regarder comme mes juges.
(Ibidem)

There is finally a last mention of Hamlet when, in his virtuous indignation, Voltaire appeals to "Messieurs les académiciens qui ont fait une étude sérieuse du théâtre" to judge if France should neglect its great masterpieces:

pour voir sur le théâtre des hommes et des femmes qu'on étrangle, des crocheteurs, des sorciers, des bouffons, et des prêtres ivres; si nôtre cour, si longtemps renommée pour sa politesse et pour son goût, doit être changée en un cabaret de bière et de brandevin; (...)

Il n'est aucune tragédie de Shakespeare où l'on ne trouve de telles scènes: j'ai vu mettre de la bière et de l'eau-de-vie sur la table dans la tragédie d'*Hamlet*; et j'ai vu les acteurs en boire.

(p.368)

The end of the essay is really flamboyant:

Figurez-vous, messieurs, Louis XIV dans sa galerie de Versailles, entouré de sa cour brillante; un *Gilles* couvert de lambeaux perce la foule des héros, des grands hommes, et des beautés qui composent cette cour: il leur propose de quitter Corneille, Racine et Molière, pour un saltimbanque qui a des saillies heureuses, et qui fait des contorsions. Comment croyez-vous que cette offre serait reçue?".
(pp.369-370)

The second Lettre⁴⁴ also maintains the superiority of the French over the English theatre, but Shakespeare's typical faults are imaginatively attributed to the Chinese:

⁴³In this connection René Wellek has observed: "Voltaire was well aware how precarious the hold of civilization is on mankind. The violence of some of his late opinions must be interpreted as the aroused feelings of an old man who sees a new flood of barbarism advancing." This presupposes in Wellek's opinion that Voltaire's views of Shakespeare never radically changed because his basic assumptions had always been the same, even at the early stages when the enthusiasm for Shakespeare seemed to predominate. (Cfr. R. Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950. M. Haven, 1965, Vol.I, pp.32-35.

⁴⁴Cfr. Voltaire, op.cit., Tome 7, 1877.

Qu'un Chinois vienne nous dire: "Nos tragédies composées sous la dinastie des Yven font encore nos délices après cinq cents années. (...) Nous avons (...) des sorciers qui descendent des airs sur un manche à balai, des vendeurs d'orviétan et des gilles, qui, au milieu d'un entretien sérieux, viennent faire leurs grimaces (...). Nous faisons paraître des savetiers avec des mandarins, et des fossoyeurs avec des princes, pour rappeler aux hommes leur égalité primitive.
(p.330)

The very transparent allusion to the "fossoyeurs" is followed by a long list of other examples of the same kind, only to be able to say: "Je leur dirais: Messieurs, jouez ces pièces a Nankin, mais ne vous avisez pas de les représenter aujourd'hui à Paris ou à Florence." The conclusion, as always, is: "...Shakespeare est un sauvage avec des étincelles de génie qui brillent dans une nuit horrible". (p.335)

Voltaire's global achievement in relation to Shakespeare has been evaluated in different ways⁴⁵ but in general there is a common agreement on the fact that all his work (including his harshest attacks) was most useful to the knowledge of Shakespeare not only in France but also in the countries which, like Italy, were its cultural satellites.

A side-effect of Shakespeare's influence on Voltaire (which again was to be reflected in Italian literature) was that, although Voltaire was firmly anchored in principle to the

⁴⁵One of the most contested opinions was that of an American critic T.R. Lounsbury, Shakespeare and Voltaire. New York, 1902, Scribner's Sons, who had taken upon himself the task of "defending" Shakespeare. Consequently he stressed, above all, Voltaire's vanity and bad faith: "The record is one of persistent misrepresentation; in some instances although it is a hard thing to say, of deliberate falsification" (p.438). The overall conclusion of Lounsbury's study was that "Voltaire really retarded the appreciation of Shakespeare on the continent, instead of advancing it". Such a radical position was attacked by various critics, among whom A.M. Rousseau, op.cit. p.37 who considered Lounsbury very prejudiced and partial, and E. Sonet, Voltaire et l'influence anglaise Slatkine Reprints, Genève 1970, p.65 who rejected Lounsbury's opinion on the grounds that: "Le revirement d'opinion qui, vers la fin du XVIIIe siècle se produisit en Angleterre en faveur de Shakespeare, devait avoir son contre-coup sur le continent et (...) les critiques mêmes de Voltaire appèlerent l'attention du public lettré sur l'oeuvre du grand tragique anglais et lui firent désirer connaître les beautés qui lui avaient été signalées."

Among Italian comments on the Voltaire/Shakespeare relationship, the most appreciative one can be found in Benedetto Croce, Ariosto Shakespeare e Corneille. Laterza, Bari, 1968,

...la prima divulgazione dello Shakespeare fuori della sua patria, si dovette...a un francese, al Voltaire col suo odi et amo, del quale è stato sempre rilevato e biasimato il lato negativo, ma non lodato abbastanza il lato positivo, cioè il coraggio mentale, la freschezza d'impressioni, che quell'interessamento per lo Shakespeare, quell'ammirazione per le cose sublimi di lui pure richiedevano. Ma è anche vero che la Francia rimase e rimane, per effetto della sua tradizione classicistica in letteratura e intellettualistica in filosofia, e nonostante fugaci entusiasmi, poco intendente dello Shakespeare. (p.185.)

classicist dramatic tradition, he introduced many innovations which, in turn, were to stimulate the movement culminating in Romantic drama.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Cfr. Sonet, op.cit., p.67

...en introduisant sur la scène française ces grands effets de théâtre, cette manière éloquente que l'on trouve dans ses drames, en présentant des sujets nationaux en multipliant la diversité des incidents en prenant plus de liberté avec le style, en améliorant la mise en scène, en dénonçant les longues et monotones confidences, enfin et surtout, en réclamant plus d'action au théâtre, Voltaire donnait la première impulsion à ce mouvement qui, en 1830, devait aboutir au feu d'artifice d'Hernani.

Baretti

Baretti's stay in England (in two successive periods, from 1751 to 1760 the first time and then from 1766 to his death in 1789) can be considered one of the important events in Italian literary history,¹ since its impact goes beyond Baretti's individual cosmopolitan experience and directly reaches the core of the complex process which took place in Italy during the transition between the Enlightenment and the Romantic movement. The concept of freedom in art assimilated from English empiricism for which Baretti pleaded, was to culminate in Manzoni's critical and artistic achievement in the first half of the 19th century. But his contact with English culture was even more important in the specific field of Shakespeare's revaluation in a country vastly dominated by incomprehension and even hostility against him, in the wake of Voltaire's writings.

A great friend and disciple of Dr. Johnson,² Baretti started his lifelong commitment in favour of Shakespeare in the second year of his stay in England, 1753, with his Dissertation.³ in which Dr. Johnson's critical guidance is quite evident. He continued in the same direction of strenuous opposition to Voltaire's attacks on Shakespeare, when he refuted Samuel Sharp's book on Italy.⁴ In reply Sharp wrote an attack on Baretti, saying that in his review La Frusta Letteraria⁵ he had spoken in quite a different manner about

¹This is the position of Walter Binni's seminal contribution to the study of Pre-Romanticism in Italy (Cfr. W. Binni, Preromanticismo Italiano, op.cit.), which is not unanimously shared by all Italian critics. Lively controversies on the importance of Baretti's contribution started very soon in Italy among his own contemporaries and continued in the following two centuries, while his reputation steadily went on growing. Two eminent Italian scholars, like M. Fubini (in his Dal Muratori al Baretti) and W. Binni were still disagreeing about him in the 1960s with regard to the assessment of his peculiar mixture of progressiveness and conservatism as well as of the extent of his originality. W. Binni describes him as "il letterato più rumorosamente rivoluzionario e insieme conservatore del secondo settecento" (Cfr. W. Binni, op.cit., p.93) where "rumorosamente" seems to allude to Baretti's quarrelsome temper and to the vigorously outspoken quality of his polemical talent.

²The extent of Johnson's influence on him has been exhaustively discussed by Catharina J.M. Lubbers-van der Brugge, Johnson and Baretti: some aspects of eighteenth century literary life in England and Italy. Groningen, J.B. Wolters, 1951 (On this subject, too, opinions have been controversial, starting from Foscolo's famous definition of Baretti as "la scimmia del Dottore", Cfr. his Prose letterarie. Firenze, 1850, Vol.II, p.236, often to be revived, even in modern times.).

³Cfr. supra, p.62, footnote 51, "Milestones".

⁴Cfr. Samuel Sharp, Letters from Italy. London, 1767.

⁵The revolutionary literary magazine he had started in 1763, which he was obliged to stop abruptly having incurred legal incrimination. That was also a reason for his return to England.

Italy. Baretti of course answered, and wrote an Appendix to the first edition of the book.⁶ Not only did they disagree about Italy and the Italians, but they also discussed Voltaire's approach to Shakespeare. Baretti proclaimed that:

Mr. Sharp is (...) quite out of the way when he says that Voltaire has presented his countrymen with some specimens of Shakespeare's work, with a view to make them admire the manner of writing of that poet. Had our author read or understood Voltaire's works, he would certainly have given another account of Voltaire's real views when he gave those specimens.⁷

and went on with his attack on Voltaire using the same arguments he was later to popularize in a much more effective way in his much-quoted 1777 Discours, that is to say Voltaire's imperfect, almost non-existent knowledge of English as proved in his translation of the "To be" monologue in Hamlet, and his attempts to abuse Shakespeare and destroy his reputation:

Voltaire, on one side, never knew English enough to construe a page of simple prose; and is actuated, on the other hand, by a Vanity bordering upon phrenzy, to appear possessed of all the modern polite languages: to shew his skill in English, he has given the world some random Criticisms on a few British poets, Dryden and Shakespeare especially. (...) On Shakespeare he bestowed here and there a few meagre praises when he was in England. But as soon as he was gone, he changed his tone, and made repeated endeavours to render him ridiculous. Let us but read his translation of Hamlet and we shall be convinced that this was his only view, and that the English, in his opinion, are intirely without taste and judgment in their extravagant admiration of this favourite poet. (...) In the above-mentioned translation of Hamlet he has turned into burlesque what was serious, and metamorphosed solemnity into buffoonery. Yet both by his translation and his remarks on the original, he wants to impose himself for a mighty connoisseur in English language and poetry. Nay, he has so far succeeded in his malignant scheme of depreciating Shakespeare that numberless of his compatriots think the English bard many degrees below the worst dramatic writer ever produced by France.⁸

The next point in the same passage was an interesting reference to the backlash in Italy of Baretti's own polemics with Voltaire on the subject:

This opinion is so far spread, that I myself was censured in print by a scribbling friar of Bologna, for a favourable account I gave my countrymen of Shakespeare; and the

⁶J. Baretti, An Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy, with observations on the mistakes of some travellers with regard to that country. London, 1769. A reprint of the 1768 edition, with an Appendix to An Account of Italy in answer to Samuel Sharp Esq (64 pages).

⁷Cfr. G. Baretti, op.cit., p.153.

⁸Cfr. G. Baretti, op.cit., pp.154-156.

friar's argument rested upon this single point, that Voltaire had been long in England as well as I, and had given an account of the same poet very different from mine. But was it possible to make Voltaire understand English as well as a native, and infuse into him some sense of shame at the same time, I am of the opinion he would curse himself for the greatest literary impostor that ever existed on his giving a new perusal to his absurd translation of Hamlet.⁹

The same translation was the object of a detailed and philologically acute analysis in Baretti's influential Discours sur Shakespeare et sur M. de Voltaire. (1777)¹⁰ written in opposition to Voltaire's 1776 letters to the French Academy, which urged the banning of the publication of Letourneur's translation of Shakespeare.

The Discours, traditionally considered the strongest statement of the case before Schlegel's lectures in Germany (which were only introduced into Italy in 1817), is written in Baretti's peculiar tone half-way between the truculent and the pedantic. It does not spring from an abstract sense of indignation nor from a purely aesthetic conception but finds its starting point in the search for an empirically ascertained critical truth based on linguistic grounds. So he begins by showing that Voltaire did not know English (or Italian either) through a meticulous accumulation of concrete evidence, and therefore could not understand Shakespeare, even suggesting that his object in preventing Letourneur's version from being published was the fear that his own blunders in translation might be exposed.¹¹

⁹Cfr. *ibidem*, p.157.

¹⁰Cfr. Discours sur Shakespeare et sur M. de Voltaire par Joseph Baretti Secrétaire pour la correspondance étrangère de l'Académie Royale Britannique A Londres chez Nourse, Libraire du Roi, Et à Paris ches Durand Neveu, MDCCLXXXVII. Although his French was far from perfect, Baretti felt bound to use that language in order to be sure of being understood by Voltaire's countrymen. In a letter to his Milanese friend Carcano on 12 August 1778 he wrote:

I am well aware that there are numerous mistakes in the "Discours", for I was obliged to print it as I wrote it, before the excitement caused by Voltaire's letter to the Academy had cooled down in Paris and London...In it I have uttered a few home truths to the French, the English, and the Italians (quoted by Lacy Collison Morley, Giuseppe Baretti and his Friends. John Murray, London, 1909, p.309)

As this letter shows, Baretti was fully aware of the genuinely European nature of the battle he was fighting in favour of Shakespeare.

¹¹Baretti's examples of Voltaire's mistranslations are all taken from Hamlet, starting from the "To be" monologue, in which the bare six monosyllables of the first line become twenty four syllables in Voltaire's interminable "alexandrines" and the whole monologue is tuned on a key of "tapage d'éloquence" and sentimentalism in the Scudéry style, completely different from the noble calm of the original. As for the prose passages Baretti quotes Horatio's comment after the first apparition of the Ghost: "A little ere the mightiest Julius fell/The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead/Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets", followed by Voltaire's translation: "Du tems de la mort de César les tombeaux s'ouvrirent, les

If Baretti had stopped here, his Discours would have remained simply a pamphlet in rather dubious taste, but he actually enlarged the discussion to include an attempt at formulating a new poetics¹² based on the truly pre-Romantic intuition that poetry is untranslatable because it expresses a distinctive individual reality that is historically and nationally determined. Therefore, the understanding of poetry required more than a bookish knowledge of the language in which it was written, it required a profound global assimilation of the language, the people, the country, the customs from which it had sprung:

morts dans leurs linceuls crièrent et sautèrent dans les rues de Rome" Baretti then offers Voltaire a language lesson:

Le verbe *to squeak* a bien une autre force en Anglois que n'a le verbe *crier* en François, particulièrement au préterit quand il est précédé par l'auxiliaire *did*; mais il est impossible de faire sentir certains tours forts d'une langue à ceux qui ne l'entendent point. On m'entendra pourtant quand je dirai, que le verbe *to gibber* veut dire *parler un langage inintelligible, parler d'une manière mal articulée*. On dérive ce mot d'*algèbre*, qui dans le sens vulgaire veut dire *une chose à la quelle personne n'entend goutte*. Voilà le verbe que Monsieur De Voltaire traduit par celui de *sauter*, qui est en Anglois *to jump*. Au lieu de faire *crier ces morts*, il auroit mieux réussi dans son dessein de faire rire ses lecteurs, s'il eut traduit *les Morts dansèrent*. *Danser* va mieux d'accord avec *sauter*, que ne va pas *crier*.

Baretti continues with his examples from the same scene:

Shakespeare appelle le coq *the bird of dawning: l'oiseau du matin*. En Anglois cela est poétique. Monsieur De Voltaire traduit *L'oiseau du point du jour*. Voilà qui est bien poétique en François!

The last example is Voltaire's translation of Hamlet's "inky coat" as:

habit couleur d'encre, parce que l'adjectif *inky*, est tiré du substantif *ink*, qui signifie *encre*. Il s'en tient à la chose, au lieu de s'en tenir à la ressemblance de la chose. Est-ce ignorance, ou malice? (Cfr. G. Baretti, Discours sur Shakespeare et M. de Voltaire, a. c. di F. Biondillo, Carabba Editore, Lanciano, 1911, Chapitre Premier, p.26.

Baretti stops giving linguistic examples because "J'ennuyerois trop, si j'allois m'étendre d'avantage sur ces infidélités de Monsieur de Voltaire", but he goes on trusting on sheer eloquence: Voltaire's translation can be compared with those of "Demoiselles de dix ans" at girls' schools and he submerges his adversary with a pelting hail of rhetorical questions:-

Juge-t-on, condamne-t-on, exécute-t-on un Auteur, surtout un Poète, surtout un Shakespeare, sur une Traduction de Demoiselle? Est-ce en traduisant comme un enfant, qu'on rend toutes les beautés d'un original? Donne-t-on par là le choix judicieux qu'un grand Ecrivain a su faire de ses mots et de ses phrases? Donne-t-on la pureté, l'élégance, l'énergie de ses expressions? Donne-t-on l'harmonie de ses périodes, le coulant de son style, la justesse de ses figures, le brillant de ses métaphores, le vif de ses saillies, l'esprit de ses allusions, l'emphase et le pathétique de ses exclamations et de ses apostrophes, la douceur, la noblesse, la fierté de sa versification, et cent autres choses qui concourent toutes à la fois à former le beau total d'une composition? (Cfr. Ibidem, pp.27-28.)

The conclusion of this flaming first chapter is in a rather subdued but not less venomous tone:

(Je) me bornerai à remarquer tout simplement, que c'est bien dommage qu'un Monsieur De Voltaire, qui s'est occupé à étudier (a) *une vingtaine de sciences*, y compris celle de la Poesie, ait taché à tant de reprises, durant cinquante ans, de faire accroire qu'il sait la langue Angloise, et pris tant de peine pour tromper la France et toute l'Europe au sujet d'un Poète Anglois, qu'il eut beaucoup mieux fait d'étudier de toute sa force. (Cfr. Ibidem, p.29)

¹²For this particular critical approach to the Discours, seen in the context of the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism, see W. Binni, Preromanticismo etc., pp.111 and ff.

Oui, Messieurs les François! Pour connoître Shakespeare il faut que vous veniez à Londres. En y arrivant, il faut que vous vous mettiez à étudier l'Anglois comme des perdus. Il faut que vous examiniez ce peuple, non pas en François, mais en Hommes. N'oubliez pas cela. Sur toutes choses prenez bien garde à ne pas apporter de ces vilains microscopes, que l'Opticien de Ferney vous vend à si bon marché. Ils ne valent rien, je vous en assure. Ils rendent les objets si opaques, si petits, qu'on ne sauroit les distinguer, et gâtent la vue en même temps. Ayez de bonnes bécicles: cela suffira. Quand pourtant vous connoîtrez bien les habitans et la langue de l'Angleterre, n'allez pas croire que vous connoîtrez Shakespeare. Il vous faudra encore étudier la langue qui lui est particulière, et qui n'est pas tout-à fait semblable à celle dont tout le monde se sert du jour à la journée. Celle-ci approche pas-a-pas de votre langue Française. Dans peu elle lui ressemblera comme un oeuf ressemble à un autre, si on y va du train qu'on y va. Ce n'est pas là le cas de la langue de Shakespeare, qui a un air à elle, un air mâle, un air de liberté, un air quelquefois un peu farouche, qui lui sied à merveille, mais qu'un étranger ne saisit pas à la hâte.¹³

That was the reason for which Shakespeare could not be understood and therefore translated by Voltaire, nor indeed by any other neo-Latin writer:

(...) je connois assés les deux langues pour être sûr d'avance, que Shakespeare n'est guère traduisible en François. Je sais qu'en général la Poésie est comme le bon vin. On ne l'extravase point sans qu'il perde de sa bonté. Ajoutez à cela, que la Poésie de Shakespeare ne sauroit être traduite pas même passablement dans aucune des Langues descendues du Latin, à cause que ses beautés ne ressemblent guère aux beautés poétiques de ces Langues, originellement moulées sur des beautés Latines pour la plus-part.¹⁴

Baretti continues to explore Shakespeare's poetic language through a critical analysis enlivened by a truly revolutionary sense of Shakespeare's wild, free creativity (but, characteristically, the high-soaring quality of his eloquence is punctuated by very prosaic household references to the bottling of good wine or to minced-meat sauce for "pasta"):

Shakespeare sut former à l'âge de trente-deux ans un langage quelquefois bas et plein d'affectation, mais plus souvent compacte, énergique, violent, d'où sort une Poésie qui enlève l'âme quand il le veut. C'est cette Poésie-là qu'on ne sauroit rendre dans aucune de Langues dérivées de la Latine. C'est là l'Arbre à pommes d'or, qu'aucun Jason venant de l'Orient ou du Midi ne sauroit approcher, tant il est gardé par l'inexorable Dragon du Nord. La langue Française par dessus ses Soeurs, est trop chatiée, trop scrupuleuse, trop dédaigneuse, pour rendre Shakespeare. Quand on traite des pensées sublimes, elle ne sait souffrir le moindre mot vulgaire, la moindre transposition un peu forte, la moindre phrase non recue ou surannée. Un enjambement dans un vers, une rime qui ne reponde pas avec la dernière exactitude, un hémistiche un peu mal séparé de l'autre, y est un défaut insupportable. La Langue de Shakespeare est plutôt embellie que gâtée par tout cela. Un certain air antique, et quelquefois sauvage, ajoute même à ses beautés poétiques. Il est plus libre dans le choix de ses expressions que le vent sur l'Océan, pour le dire à sa manière. Son Dialogue est tantôt en vers blancs, tantôt en vers rimés, tantôt en prose, et n'a tantôt qu'un mot ou deux à la place d'un vers.

¹³Cfr. G. Baretti, op.cit., Chapitre troisième, pp.39-40.

¹⁴Cfr. Ibidem, Chapitre Second, p.30.

Sa langue se soumet à tout cela sans broncher. Allez selon le génie de la poésie Française l'enchaîner dans des Alexandrins, qui vous rappellent une procession de moines marchans deux à deux d'un pas égal et grave le long d'une rue droite, vous ne le reconnoîtrez plus. Ce sera faire danser des minuets à qui ne sait que s'élancer comme un Cerf. Allez le faire parler en prose tout du long, ce sera un ragout sans sel.¹⁵

In the fourth chapter of the Discours Baretti raises another important question: the opposition to the so-called Aristotelian unities. Baretti's point is very practical and concrete: it requires no more imagination to follow Shakespeare's rapid changes of scene than to fancy yourself in Persia while you are seated in a Paris theatre. From a more theoretical point of view it means a sharp contrast between the abstract rationalist rules and an already pre-Romantic need for an individualized concrete reality, for the living characters created by the poetic intuition of sentiment: "Qu'Aristote dise ce qu'il veut, j'oppose à son autorité l'expérience de Shakespeare, de Lope de Vega et de plusieurs autres." In the light of Baretti's pleading for concrete individualization in art, the comparison between the Ghost in Hamlet and Voltaire's imitation in Sémiramis can then be seen as a practical application of his critical method:

Supposons néanmoins qu'il fut possible d'introduire chès toutes les Nations un Goût général en fait d'Ouvrages d'esprit, seroit-ce là une acquisition bien avantageuse aux Gens de lettres? Chasser la variété de ces Ouvrages, et rendre la façon de penser et de s'exprimer uniforme en tous lieux! La plaisante manière d'embellir le monde intellectuel! Pourquoi Monsieur De Voltaire ne pousse-t-il pas sa pointe plus loin, et ne nous conseille-t-il pour l'embellissement du Monde physique de nous en tenir dans tout Pais à un seul mets, à une seule sorte de boisson, à une seule chose de chaque genre pendant toute nôtre vie? Que ne va-t-il pas jusqu'à nous exhorter de tuer partout toutes les brunes, afin que le monde n'ait que des blondes, ou bien toutes les blondes afin qu'il n'y ait que des brunes? De pendre tous les sots, afin qu'il n'y ait que des gens d'esprit dans tout l'Univers?

Quant'à moi je me contente dans mon petit particulier de la variété que la Nature me présente en toutes choses, pourvu qu'elles soient bonnes dans leurs divers genres. Je me contente sur toutes choses de ce grand manque d'uniformité que j'aperçois dans tant d'ouvrages d'esprit. Si je pouvois le faire! Je viserois incessamment à transporter dans mes écrits toutes sortes des beautés indigènes ou exotiques, et ferois en sorte de n'en gâter aucune dans le transport; ce qui n'a pas été le cas de Monsieur De Voltaire, quand il s'avisa de transporter des Pais étrangers dans sa Sémiramis un de ces Etres fantastiques, qu'on appelle communement des Revenans.

Lui, qui traite Shakespeare d'Histrion barbare et de Gille de Village, quelle sorte de Gille et d'Histrion n'est-il pas lui-même, lorsqu'il descend dans la palestre en vue de mesurer sa force à la force de ce compère-là? Mettons en parallèle le

¹⁵Cfr. *Ibidem*, pp.30-31.

Spectre du Roi de Dannemarc chès Shakespeare, avec l'Ombre de Ninus chès Monsieur de Voltaire, et nous verrons bientôt qui des deux est l'Histrien et le Gille.¹⁶

This famous comparison between the two ghosts had been preceded about ten years before by the one made on almost similar terms, in his Hamburgische Dramaturgie (1767)¹⁷ by G.E. Lessing. Baretti's isolated (and during his lifetime unsuccessful) battle against the Aristotelian unities and Voltaire had been fought and won earlier in Germany by Lessing, who had practically destroyed the prestige of French theatre and French critical methods in favour of Shakespeare's reputation (Baretti could not be aware of this first of all because he never mentioned the German critic and he was too genuinely honest to have hidden a possible knowledge of Lessing's work, and also because he did not know German and the first incomplete and faulty translation of the Dramaturgie only appeared in French as late as 1785).¹⁸

What was indiscutably Baretti's real source of inspiration in writing the Discours was Dr. Johnson's Preface to his edition of Shakespeare (1765), as well as his numerous conversations with him in the following years on the subject. All critics commonly agree that, before going to England Baretti was totally ignorant of Shakespeare and only with the help of Dr. Johnson was he able to deal adequately with Shakespeare's work. Already in the Dissertation in 1735, when he mentioned Shakespeare in the same breath as Homer and Corneille he was merely reflecting Dr. Johnson's well-known position. More than ten years later, in his Manners and Customs Baretti praised Carlo Gozzi so extravagantly as to

¹⁶Cfr. G. Baretti, op.cit., Chapitre Sixième, pp.78-79.

¹⁷Cfr. for discussion of this subject and for a detailed comparative study of Lessing's and Baretti's comparison, Luigi Morandi, Voltaire contro Shakespeare Baretti contro Voltaire. Città di Castello, 1884, pp.75-77.

¹⁸As already mentioned with reference to Verri (Cfr supra p.32, footnote 26. "The Theatre Question"), roughly at the same time the 18 year-old Goethe was ecstasically discovering Wieland's translation of Shakespeare. His enthusiasm also carried away his friends and important works such as Herder's essay on Shakespeare (1773) and Lenz's Dramen und dramatische Entwürfe (1774) were published (starting a cult dedicated to the trinity Homer-Ossian-Shakespeare), while Goethe's subsequent works, the play Goetz von Berlichingen (1773) and Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1796) won the first memorable victory in favour of an art directly inspired by Shakespeare, marking the official beginning of a new poetical climate in Germany. Wilhelm Meister in particular established Hamlet as Shakespeare's most important play and Hamlet's character continued to be the prime focus of Shakespearean criticism in all major Germany literary movements, starting from the Sturm und Drang.

rank him next to Shakespeare ("il più sorprendente genio che dopo lo Shakespeare sia comparso in alcun secolo e paese"), which really does make one wonder how much he knew about Shakespeare at the time. By 1777, when the Discours was written, Baretti had certainly absorbed enough information as to be able to cope brilliantly with the task of confuting Voltaire, which Johnson refused to take upon himself as he did not feel this task was congenial to his tastes.¹⁹

With regard to the unities in particular Dr. Johnson's ideas are reflected quite faithfully in the Discours,²⁰ but the polemical example of Hamlet's Ghost and Sémiramis'

¹⁹Cfr. C.J.M. Lubbers-van der Brugge, op.cit., p.118: "Boswell urged Johnson to publish an article attacking Voltaire; but although Johnson said that he would "perhaps" do it, in point of fact he never did."

²⁰Cfr. A. Devalle, La critica letteraria nel '700: Giuseppe Baretti, i suoi rapporti con Voltaire, Johnson e Parini. Milano, 1932 and C.J.M. Lubbers-van der Brugge, op.cit., for a detailed comparison between the Discours and the Preface. As an example of a striking similarity the following passages can be compared:

PREFACE

The necessity of observing the unities of time and place arises from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible. The objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria and the next at Rome, supposes that when the play opens the spectator really imagines himself at Alexandria and believes that his walk to the theatre has been a voyage to Egypt and that he lives in the days of Anthony and Cleopatra. (...) Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation. The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses and know from the very first to the last, that the stage is only a stage and that the players are only plays. (Cfr. S. Johnson-Preface to Shakespeare, 1765. The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol.VII, ed. A. Sherbo, Yale University Press, 1968, pp.76-77).

In the writings of other poets
a character is too often an individual;
in those of Shakespeare

DISCOURS

Est-il possible dans le court espace de trois ou quatre heures de rendre vraisemblables des Faits, qu'ont duré des années entières, à des Gens qui savent n'être là que durant ces trois ou quatre heures? (...) Ceux qui me font de si belles interrogations, auront le bonté de me permettre que je les interroge aussi (...) avant de leur donner une réponse (...). Comment donc ceux qui savent d'être à Paris et dans la salle de la comédie, peuvent-ils se donner le change et croire qu'ils sont à Rome, à Mémphis ou à Samarcande? (...) Non, non, ces messieurs, ces dames, ces grisettes ne se figurent rien de toutes ces choses là. Ils ne les trouvent que probables, que vraisemblables, à l'aide de leur imagination! (...) L'illusion messieurs? Je viens de vous dire qu'aucun d'entre vous n'est sujet à la moindre illusion dans votre cas? Si tout le monde chez vous est dans son bon sens, si personne ne prend jamais le change pendant un seul instant, si chacun sait où il est et de quoi il s'agit, où diable seroit l'illusion? (Ch. Quatrième, 49-50-51)

"ombre de Ninus" is exclusively Baretti's idea. He starts with a description of the Ghost which stresses all those elements of grandeur and frightfulness which were appealing to the new pre-Romantic sense of the sublime:

(...) voilà le spectre de Shakespeare qui sort soudainement d'entre les coulisses. C'est l'Esprit du Roi de Danemarque (...) Il est (a) armé de toutes pièces, le (b) visage pâle, (c) la contenance morne, et son (d) bâton de commandement dans sa main. Il s'avance (e) à pas lents et majestueux, et se montre à deux Soldats qui sont de garde, qui ont jadis combattu sous ses ordres en une grande bataille donnée dans un Pays couvert de glace. Le lieu où il paroît est un endroit solitaire, au milieu d'une nuit d'hiver des plus froides, qui n'est éclairée que par les étoiles, et couverte de silence. N'est-ce pas là un Spectre qui sait se confirmer aux notions du Vulgaire, et paroître en vrai Revenant? J'aime à le voir accompagné de plusieurs circonstances qui concourent à en rehausser la terribilité, et qui contribuent à la rendre vraisemblable autant qu'on peut rendre vraisemblables les Créatures de l'Imagination, quand elle s'avise de leur donner un Corps humain.²¹

The last paragraph clearly shows the importance for Baretti of the key concept of "vraisemblance", which was common to both the rationalist poetics of the Enlightenment and to the new pre-Romantic need for the concrete and the natural, associated with the new taste for free imagination. The classicist "vraisemblable" which the Enlightenment had striven for through the unities, was now being replaced with the "vraisemblable" in the Barettian sense of practical common sense, with a concern for a human, psychological natural truth centred on coherent characters, acting in a credible situation and using a national popular, not abstract language.²²

it is commonly a species.
(Ibidem, p.62)

Une des plus grandes perfections de Shakespeare est celle de mettre devant nos yeux des caractères qui sont très souvent des prototypes. Les principaux personnages dans ses pièces ne représentent point des individus mais des espèces.
(Ch. Troisième, pp.38-39.)

It is very interesting to notice how the very same thoughts are "dressed" in different clothes according to the different style and tone. Dr Johnson is always extremely grave, sententious and sedate; Baretti engages himself in a lively, almost theatrical direct dialogue with his readers, with lots of questions, exclamation marks, interjections. Johnson's impersonal rather neutral "spectators" are sociologically characterized by Baretti as "ces messieurs, ces dames, ces grisettes". Baretti constantly overstates things as when, referring to Shakespeare's ability to draw not "des individus mais des espèces", he calls it "une des plus grandes perfections de Shakespeare". Johnson simply issues a bare statement with no value judgments, comparing "the writings of other poets" and "those of Shakespeare".

²¹Cfr. G. Baretti; op.cit., Chapitre sixième, pp.79-80.

²²Cfr. W. Binni, op.cit., pp.114-115.

The Ghost's disappearance at the cock's crow is an excuse for Baretti to give Voltaire another language lesson. Voltaire in his Appel had sneered at this episode and Baretti explains that, in the first place, if the verb "chanter" applied to a cock may be somewhat comic, the English verb to "crow", "n'est point burlesque du tout, par ce qu'il exprime un cri et non pas un chant". In the second place, unlike the French "coq", the noun "cock" has nothing laughable about it; indeed it is a symbol of courage, perhaps owing to the English habit of cock-fighting. In the third place, according to popular English beliefs the cock's "cri nocturne, exprimé par un verbe qui manque à la Langue François, fait fuir les Revenans."

Baretti is at his pungent best when he turns from Shakespeare's to Voltaire's ghost:

Voilà le Spectre du Roi Danois chès l'Histrion barbare et le Gille de Village:
Voyons à présent l'Ombre de Ninus chès le Poète philosophe.²³

To begin with, Voltaire takes no pains at all to make his ghost credible in the slightest, as he is far too superior to conform to accepted ideas: Ninus' ghost arrives in broad daylight in a crowded festive assembly of noisy and petulant courtiers. Moreover, in order to save the sacred unity of place a cabinet is transformed into a temple illico et immediate.²⁴

Son (Voltaire's) Ombre de Ninus se fait voir, non pas dans une solitude silencieuse et dans les ténèbres de la nuit, mais un beau jour de fête, en plein midi, dans un joli Cabinet, qui vient d'être métamorphosé en un Temple fort magnifique. Cette métamorphose du Cabinet en Temple, pour le dire en passant, est uniquement controuvée afin que deux Acteur actuellement sur la Scène n'ayent point à changer de place, ce qui seroit contre une des Unités d'Aristote. On ne sauroit pourtant nier, qu'il ne soit un peu absurde de recourir à une magie arbitraire, qui change tout à coup un bâtiment en un autre, sans que ceux qui sont dedans, ou bien les Spectateurs, aient la moindre raison de s'attendre à ce changement. Dans ce Temple ainsi bâti à l'improviste, voilà Sémiramis entourée des Seigneurs et Dames de sa Cour, du Clergé, du Peuple, et de ses Gardes. Le beau coup d'oeil! Il n'y a pas d'endroit au monde plus à propos pour y faire paroître un Revenant! ²⁵

²³Cfr. G. Baretti, op.cit., Chapitre Sixième, p.82.

²⁴The same comment was later made by Schlegel who found another example of the same locomotive faculty imparted to buildings by Voltaire in Brutus (act I, scene III). Cfr. L. Morandi, op.cit., p.77.

²⁵Cfr. G. Baretti, op.cit. Chapitre Sixième, p.82.

According to the plot so far, Sémiramis, "nouvelle Jocaste" has just married her own son Ninias, who, she thinks, is "Fils d'un Sarmate; c'est à dire d'un Polonais, ou d'un Lithuanien", a big sturdy fellow some sixteen or seventeen years old who has won so many battles that he has been appointed "Maréchal Général des Armées de Babylone, tout comme Monsieur de Turenne dans un age plus avancé le fut jadis des armées Françaises."

Baretti's account goes on:

C'est dans ce Temple, devant cette Reine, devant ce Fils, devant tout ce grand Monde, que le Revenant doit faire son apparition. Un Tombeau qui est dans un coin du Temple, s'entr' ouvre, et l'Ombre de Ninus en sort.²⁶

It is necessary to know, as Baretti points out, that this is not the ghost's first appearance: three months before Ninus had decided to take revenge on his perfidious widow and had begun to appear before her "en Revenant pendant la nuit, un glaive à la main", after lying peacefully in his tomb for fourteen years and nine months. But now, "le jour est venu que sa vengeance doit être consommée":

Il sort donc du Tombeau en Ombre Royale; c'est-à-dire, habillé en Roi, couvert d'un crêpe noir et transparent, à travers du quel on peut apercevoir ses superbes habits, et la belle couronne qu'il a sur la tête. La voila cette Ombre, qui s'avance d'un air fier, et va s'asseoir sur une estrade au milieu de la belle assemblée.²⁷

A ludicrous dialogue between the son Ninias and Ninus the father then follows (with Baretti's caustic comments punctuating it) and finally the ghost gets up and goes back to his tomb, ordering the Queen to respect his ashes and threatening her with death.

Baretti's conclusion is:

Je m'adresse à présent a tous mes Lecteurs depuis Péterbourg jusqu'a Naples, comme a fait Monsieur De Voltaire dans son Plan de la Tragédie d'Hamlet, ou bien je m'adresse a l'Académie de la Crusca, comme il a fait dans sa Lettre à l'Académie Française, et je les prie de me dire la quelle des deux Ombres a mieux joué son role, et sait mieux le métier de Revenant. Et-ce celle de Shakespeare, qui est effrayante, quoi qu'elle se présente tranquillement aux Spectateurs, et qu'elle parle d'un ton triste sans montrer la moindre colère, ou celle de Monsieur De Voltaire qui se fait dévancer per le tonnerre, et qui apostrophe Ninias d'un air terrible, menaçant ensuite Sémiramis de la faire mourir tôt ou tard?²⁸

²⁶Cfr. Ibidem, p.83.

²⁷Cfr. ibidem, pp.83-84.

²⁸Cfr. ibidem, pp.85-86.

The absurdity of Voltaire's attempt to reconcile the "terribilité" of the scene with the artificial scheme of the unities in ridiculous and certainly not credible circumstances is effectively contrasted by Baretti with Shakespeare's natural coherence in reaching the most original poetic effects through the free play of the imagination. Besides, Baretti very successfully shows the implied contradiction of a Shakespearian imitation being trapped in the rationalist poetics of the Enlightenment.²⁹

After exploding in a wide-ranging invective³⁰ on Voltaire's arrogance against Shakespeare, Baretti suggests that the idea of the "ombre de Ninus" may have come from an Italian Semiramide of the 16th century;³¹ in the conclusion of the sixth chapter, Baretti takes up a linguistic point again and makes fun of Voltaire's translation of Marcellus' words in the ghost scene: "Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio", with "Parle-lui, Docteur".

The last important point in the Discours also deals with linguistic matters; referring to Voltaire's statements that "...on (a) fait plus facilement cent bon vers en Italian qu'on n'en peut faire dix en François."³² and that Italian is an effeminate language because of its too

²⁹Cfr. W. Binni, op.cit. p.122.

³⁰ Mais que dirons-nous d'un homme, qui tantôt donne le titre de Génie à Shakespeare, et tantôt le titre de Sauvage ivre, et d'Histrion barbare? Qui donne tantôt raison aux Anglois les mieux instruits de ce qu'il l'admirent et tantôt s'évertue avec toute l'animosité possible pour le rendre abominable à l'Académie Française et à tout l'Univers?
(...) Ne vous en étonnez point, Messieurs les Anglois. Cet homme-là n'a fait d'autre métier depuis plus d'un demi-siècle, que chercher à détruire la Religion de ses Pères; et jamais suffisamment courageux pour soutenir à tout hazard les opinions qu'il a osé avancer mille et mille fois, il a traité tout de long de menteurs et de Calomnieurs tous ceux qui ne l'ont point considéré comme Chrétien. C'est sa manière. Il veut dire tout ce que bon lui semble de tous les ordres, de tous les états: Il veut maltraiter la Sorbonne, écraser la Hierarchy ecclésiastique, détruire les Moines, étrangler les Journalistes, proscrire les Auteurs de tous les siècles et de tous les Païs, à l'exception de son cher Confucius; et si quelqu'un ose seulement le toucher du bout pointu de sa plume, c'est un vaurien, c'est un malheureux, c'est un menteur, un calomniateur, un maraud, un faquin, qu'on devroit fouetter, pendre, écarteler, bruler, exterminer à tous les diables sans la moindre miséricorde. Voilà son système. (Chapitre Sixième, pp.89-90)

³¹Written by Muzio Manfredi from Cesena, in 1593.

³²Cfr. G. Baretti, op.cit., Chapitre Septième, p.103.

many vowels,³³ Baretti shows that discussions of this kind are superseded in the light of a new pre-Romantic feeling for the individual inimitable beauty of each single language according to the way it is handled.³⁴

On the whole, although Baretti has been appreciated by many Italian critics³⁵ more for his liveliness, his energy and enthusiasm rather than for his scientific qualities,³⁶ his

³³This remark had been made for the first time by Père Bouhours author of *La Manière de bien penser dans les Ouvrages d'esprit* (1687), sharply critical of Italian poetry, which had been polemically answered by Marquis Orsi with *Considerazioni nelle opere degli antichi sopra un famoso libro francese intitolato: La manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit cioè la Maniera di ben pensare ne' Componimenti* (1703). The controversy between the two authors became very famous and had an important influence on subsequent literary developments in Italy as elsewhere.

³⁴Cfr. G. Baretti, op.cit. Chapitre Huitième, pp.122-123:

Ce qu'il y a de vrai dans cette affaire des Langues, est que toute langue est belle entre les mains de ceux qui savent s'en servir, et que les Sots les gâtent toutes. Chès Monsieur De Buffons et chès Monsieur de Marmontel, la Langue François est charmante. L'Angloise est admirable chès le Docteur Johnson et chès Monsieur Gibbons. L'Italienne est laide, est abominable, chès Carlo Denina est chès le Comte Verri. Faut-il dire pourquoi? Hélas, il me fâche bien de le dire; mais nous avons acutellement en Italie une race d'Ecrivains, qui croyent faire des miracles en farcisant leurs barbouillages de mots et de phrases Françoises. Ah la maudite engeance! Si une loix salutaire en envoyoit quelque vingtaine aux galères, je crois. Dieu me pardonne, que je briguerois l'emploi de Comite! Ils font bien pis que de rendre leur langue effeminée: ils la rendent monstrueuse!

While expressing an admirably modern conception, Baretti does not resist the temptation of using his old "whip" against Italian authors he quite unreasonably hated, like Denina and Pietro Verri. Especially in the case of Verri he was particularly harsh later in the same chapter, associating him with Goldoni (another one of his bugbears, probably because of Voltaire's admiration for him as a theatre reformer) whom he criticizes for an absurd play called *Germondo* which he refuses to believe is the work of the same author who had written *Le Bourru Bienfaisant*:

En attendant, que Goldoni soit l'Auteur du *Bourru Bienfaisant*, ou ne le soit pas, j'exhorte Monsieur De Voltaire à se bien persuader, que les Ouvrages Italiens de son *Réformateur du Théâtre*, de son *Liberateur de l'Italie*, ne doivent point être lu par des honnêtes Démonnelles d'aucun Pais; mais uniquement par cette espèce d'Arrière-petites-Filles qui gagnent leur vie dans une certaine rue de Vénise appelée la *Rue de Charbon*, et ne doivent faire l'admiration, que de ce Comte Pietro Verri de Milan, mentionné plus haut, qui a eu la bonté de les prôner de toute sa force dans une (a) Feuille Périodique Italienne intitulée le *Caffé de Démétrius*. (Cfr. Ibidem, pp.129-130.)

Baretti is ferocious in attacking the Milanese group founder of *Il Caffé* (the two Verri brothers, Pietro and Alessandro, and Cesare Beccaria). Although he shared many of its anti-Arcadian, anti-purist, anti-pedantic ideals for which they fought under the banner of the "Cose, non parole" slogan, at the same time, being the exponents of those basic values of the Enlightenment against which Baretti felt deep hostility, they became his favourite target. As an example cfr. Ibidem, pp.124-125 running as follows:

J'ai déjà dit ce qu'est l'Italien d'Algarotti. L'Italien du Marquis Beccaria ne vaut pas mieux, soit dans son Livre *De' Delitti e delle Pene*, soit dans cet autre *Dello Stile*. Mon pauvre Comte Pietro Verri de Milan, en sa qualité d'Ecrivain, est encore pire qu'Algarotti et que Beccaria. C'est un Cavalier fort rébarbatif, qui ne sait rien de rien, et qui a la rage de tout savoir. Algarotti étoit grand Admirateur de Monsieur De Voltaire, comme de raison. Beccaria et Verri le sont aussi: mais, au lieu d'apprendre de Monsieur De Voltaire à écrire leur langue avec pureté, comme il écrit la sienne, ils n'ont appris de lui qu'à décider de toutes choses d'un ton impérieux, et sans avoir ni l'un, ni l'autre, la milliême partie de son gout, de son savoir, et de son feu. Malgré cela ils ont leurs admirateurs tout comme Goldoni, par la seule raison qu'*Un Sot trouve toujours un plus Sot qui l'admire*.

³⁵For example Franco Fido in his introduction to Giuseppe Baretti, *Opere*. Rizzoli, Milano, 1967, p.25, who finds Binni's view of Baretti as a direct precursor of Romanticism rather excessive, points out on the other hand that his real originality lies in the tone he uses, in the conviction and effectiveness with which

contribution to Shakespearian criticism, certainly started off a sort of cultural revolution thanks to which Shakespeare became a much more well-known figure in late 18th century Italy. The important discussion on Hamlet contained in the Discours can be considered yet another example of the play's association with fundamental turning-points in the process of Shakespeare's reception in Italy.

Baretti opposes to the eclectic cosmopolitan Voltaire, his experience as a patient linguist and sensitive translator.

³⁶Croce's judgment of the Discours also was along the same lines:

[il Baretti] disse splendidamente molte verità ma non ne sentì profondamente una che tutto lo dominasse, e di cui egli diventasse per tal modo, come lo storico rappresentante. Scrittori meno vivaci di lui, meno di lui forniti di buon senso e di chiarezza, ma che più di lui si tormentarono a penetrare nel fondo delle cose, ebbero maggiore efficacia, e serbano nella coscienza de' posteri stima maggiore. (Cfr. B. Croce Problemi di Estetica, p.444 quoted by S.A. Nulli, op.cit., p.18.)

PART III
FRENCH AND ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE
THE FIRST ITALIAN AMLETO

Domenico Valentini and Giustina Renier-Michiel

An important (although almost unheeded) step forward in the process of liberation from French cultural bondage in consequence of a more direct reception of Shakespeare in Italy¹ was made in 1756 by Canon Domenico Valentini, an eccentric and amusing character, who translated Julius Caesar² "in lingua Toscana" without knowing any English at all. Not only did he not hide this fact, but he openly explained:

In quanto alla mia Traduzione sento da molti disapprovarsi, che io preso abbia il titolo di Traduttore, perchè a tutti è ben noto, ch'io a cagione del mio impaziente temperamento non intendo la Lingua Inglese, e che alcuni Cavalieri di quella illustre Nazione, che perfettamente intendono la Lingua Toscana, hanno avuta la bontà, e la pazienza di spiegarmi questa Tragedia.³

In his preface to the play Valentini defended translation from the accusation of being a "mestiere (...) troppo facile, e troppo servile", and translators from the common opinion that being unable to produce original works, they were like "Pittori puramente Copisti" who could only "rappresentar con diversi colori i pensieri altrui". He reinforced his thesis by quoting the example of all the great Roman classical authors who, translating Greek literary works into Latin, were convinced "di molto giovare alla loro Nazione", and drew the portrait of the ideal translator as fulfilling no less than four difficult conditions. In the first place he was to be a man of great taste and culture, so as to be able to choose really valuable works and not, as it often happened:

¹Apart from the very few direct contacts already mentioned, Shakespeare had reached Italy about ten years before through the deforming mediation of French culture (the first ten volumes of La Place's translation 1746-1749) derived from the already deformed image coming from Restoration England and English "improvers" of Shakespeare.

²Cfr. IL GIULIO CESARE - Tragedia Istorica di Guglielmo Shakespeare - Tradotta dall'Inglese in Lingua Toscana - DAL DOTTOR DOMENICO VALENTINI - Professore di Storia Ecclesiastica nell'Università di Siena - IN SIENA L'ANNO MDCCLVI - nella stamperia di Agostino Bindi - Con Licenza de' Superiori.

³Cfr. Prefazione del traduttore, ibidem.

opere irregolari o scandalose, ed opposte alla Religione ed alla Morale, o inette e sciapite, e di niuna importanza, che altrimenti meriterebbero d'esser sepolte in un'eterna obliuione.

The next necessary condition was the obvious one that he needed an absolute mastery of the two languages,⁴ since the synonyms given by vocabularies, if examined "con occhio filosofico", in actual fact were usually discovered as not being synonyms at all.

Thirdly, the translator was to be an expert on the subject dealt with in the original work; he was to be therefore, according to the subject: "buon Teologo, buon Fisico, buon Metafisico, buon Astronomo, buon Architetto" and so on. Last but not least, the translator was to be "dotato dalla Natura del medesimo ingegno, e delle medesime disposizioni, che si trovano nel suo Originale, acciocché possa perfettamente a quello livellarsi, ed in tutte le sue parti conuenevolmente imitarlo". But in addition to all this what was required and was rarely found was the "ingegno filosofico" as defined by Locke: "la facoltà di ben discernere, e ben distinguere le differenze, che passano tra i vari oggetti" and in the case of translation this meant imitating "non solo i pensieri, ma eziandio il lume, col quale s'espongono l'energia, e la forza con cui s'esprimono, la grazia, il metodo e la chiarezza". This very topical application of Locke's philosophy to the theory of translation is illustrated, among others, by an example taken from five different Italian translators of Anacreon's odes (Paolo Rolli included) who all failed in this respect, while a French one, the abbé Regner, had beaten them all.⁵

The historical importance of Valentini's accurate prose translation lies in the fact that, unlike the French adaptors who translated fragmentary passages of Shakespeare's plays, or summarized them, Valentini is the first (followed by Verri) who trod the right path straight from the beginning and translated one complete play, transposing the whole of a

⁴Being personally so far from fulfilling this condition, he was very honest in defining his position with regard to the title of "Traduttore":

(...) io qui (...) dichiaro in qual senso io prendo il titolo controverso; perchè ognuno è padrone d'attaccare alle parole quell'idea, che più gli piace, quando apertamente se ne dichiara. (...) mi chiamino dunque Semitraduttore o Contraduttore, o con qualunque altro titolo come lor piace. (Ibidem)

⁵Ibidem.

Shakespearian microcosm without arbitrary omissions or alterations. The other important element is that for the first time an Italian author in Italy (Rolli and Baretti did it of course in England)⁶ dared to justify Shakespeare's transgression of the classicist rules in homage to his overflowing imagination:

Tal fu la sovrabbondanza del di lui Spirito, e così fervida, e così fertile la sua straordinaria Immaginazione, che lo trasportò a trascurar le Regole prescritte al Dramma, qual impetuoso Fiume, che sdegnando di star ristretto nell'angusto suo Letto, superate le sponde si stende per ogni parte nelle vicine Campagne. Le Regole fissate da Aristotele, da Orazio, ed altri non so s'io mi dica severi, o superstiziosi Critici, sono bastevolmente ampie per i mediocri talenti, ma per una Immaginazione così forte, così rapida, così vivace, qual'era quella di Shakespeare, comparivano troppo ristretti; e se dentro quei prescritti limiti contenuto si fosse, noi certamente privati saremmo di grandi bellezze.⁷

Valentini thought Shakespeare's defects were "circondati (...) dappertutto da sì nobili, e sì luminosi pensieri dipinti in colori sì risplendenti, e sì vivi" that they should be forgiven, and he based this judgement on the authority of critics like Quintilian, Longinus and Horace (applying this latter's maxim on moral qualities in satire I "Cum mea compenset vitiis bona" to spiritual qualities); he also justified the combination of comic and tragic elements as follows:

⁶Only Lorenzo Pignotti was to fight the same battle against incomprehension and often hostility towards Shakespeare. He was the author of the poem *La tomba di Shakespeare* (1779) dedicated to Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu who had sent him her *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets, with some Remarks upon the Misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire*. 1769. In his dedication Pignotti drew a rather depressing picture of the contemporary situation in the Italian literary world:

Da gran tempo la più sana parte delle persone di gusto s'è accorta che moltissime regole stabilite dai critici son false, giacchè si trovano smentite dalla natura. I poeti più illustri, consultando solo questa grande maestra, e ignorando e disprezzando le regole, son giunti a toccare gli animi sensibili, anche peccando contro le critiche leggi. Non si ardisce però condannarle apertamente, e l'autorità di Aristotele, che ha perduto tutto il suo peso nelle scienze, dura a tiranneggiare ancora il buon gusto, (...). Quando vien fatto al Poeta di muovere, di diletare gli ascoltanti, violando le regole, bisogna allora condannar le regole, e non il Poeta. Eppure tanta è la forza dei pregiudizi, che talora anche i culti Lettori, dopo aver pianto sulle Tragedie di Shakespeare, ed essere stati maravigliosamente dilettrati dall'Ariosto, condannano poi questi poeti, perchè hanno peccato contro le regole d'Aristotele.

For more details on the opinions on Shakespeare held among others, by playwrights such as Goldoni, and Alfieri, poets such as Foscolo, Monti, Metastasio, Cesarotti, actors such as Riccoboni and his wife, etc., Cfr. Collison-Morley L., op.cit.; A. Graf, *L'anglomania e l'influsso inglese in Italia nel secolo XVIII*. Torino, Loescher, 1911; S.A. Nulli op.cit.; M. Scherillo "Ammiratori e imitatori dello Shakespeare prima del Manzoni", *Nuova Antologia*. 16 novembre 1892; G. Schiavello *La fama dello Shakespeare nel secolo 18°* Camerino, 1904.

⁷Preface to *Il Giulio Cesare*. op.cit.

Se ha mescolato il Sublime con bassi Ragionamenti non si dee questo tanto attribuire al Poeta quanto al Soggetto, ch'essendo Storico schivar non poteva d'introdurre i Plebei, i cui caratteri veramente son bassi, ma sono altresì naturali, e per tutto il corso dell'Opera ben conservati.⁸

The same justification held, in his opinion, for not observing the unities of time and place, as proved by an example from Aristophanes, enlivened by a touch of his eccentric sense of humour:

Lo stesso Soggetto Istorico l'obbligò a trasportare in diversi luoghi la Scena; Ed io dir non saprei, se Aristofane, che nella commedia delle Ranocchie introduce Bacco prima in Tebe, poscia nei Campi Elisi, e quindi nell'Abitazion di Plutone, similmente difendersi possa con qualche legittima scusa dell'aver violate le regole non solo dell'unità del luogo, ma ancora del tempo. Io non ho mai viaggiato da Tebe ai Campi Elisi, nè punto curioso sarei di viaggiar da questi all'Abitazion di Plutone, ma pur crederei, che molti giorni vi bisognassero per far questo viaggio.⁹

In conclusion, Valentini's greatest merit was to have been an isolated forerunner in taking the path destined to lead 18th century Italian culture towards appreciation and assimilation of the Shakespearian universe in the course of the next century.

Before the close of the century, a systematic translation of some Shakespearian plays was attempted by Giustina Renier-Michiel, one of the most distinguished gentlewomen in Venetian high society. In 1798, under the supervision of Melchiorre Cesarotti, she published her translation of Othello which was followed by Macbeth and Coriolanus under the collective title of Opere drammatiche di Shakespeare, volgarizzate da una cittadina veneta. She was supposed to have translated Hamlet, too, but only a few fragments were known to be scattered among her manuscripts. I was fortunate enough to come across one of them at the Museo Correr Library in Venice: it is a big yellowed sheet, written in a very elegant handwriting, with the translation of the "To be or not to be" monologue.¹⁰

Renier-Michiel's translations are based on those by Letourneur from the linguistic point of view, and on Johnson's Preface from the critical point of view. They share many of the characteristics of Verri's translations, being influenced by the same pre-Romantic

⁸Ibidem.

⁹Ibidem.

¹⁰Cfr. Appendix II.

cultural climate, but they are of a rather mediocre stylistic level and therefore are only to be considered historically important as a preparation for the period of fervid Romantic enthusiasm for Shakespeare which was about to begin, after the age of the Enlightenment.

La Place - Ducis - Letourneur

La Place's Shakespearian translations¹ were the answer to the growing interest in Shakespeare in France towards the middle of the 18th century. However distorted his presentation (which he proclaimed with great honesty right from the start, in his motto in the frontispiece "Non verbum reddere verbo") he afforded the average Frenchman, (and consequently, owing to the process outlined in the preceding chapters also the average Italian) the opportunity to become acquainted with Shakespeare for the first time.

If Voltaire's critical work (both in its positive and negative aspects in relation to Shakespeare) mirrored the French contemporary preoccupation with the "goût-génie" contrast on a theoretical plane and demonstrated the need for enlivening French theatre practice through innovations derived from Shakespeare², La Place's translations and "sommaires" were the actual basis on which later French writers with no knowledge of English wrote their adaptations.

The first of these was Jean-François Ducis, and his adaptation of Hamlet was the first one to reach the French stage in 1769 (and the Italian stage in Francesco Gritti's translation in 1774: once more Hamlet was associated with an important landmark in the history of Shakespeare reception in Italy).

In a long preface, Discours sur le Théâtre Anglois, La Place outlines his main reasons for translating Shakespeare into French, starting with a critical judgement based on the new appreciation for genius as a direct emanation of nature ("il puisa dans son génie,

¹Le Théâtre Anglois. Tome I, A Londres, MDCCXLVI. (This volume contained Othello and the third part of Henry VI; the second volume Richard III, Hamlet, Macbeth; the next two volumes contained Cymbeline, Jules César, Cléopâtre, Timon, Les Femmes de bonne humeur followed by "Analyses ou sommaires des tragi-comédies ou comédies non traduites".

²Cfr. Marion Monaco, Shakespeare on the French Stage in the Eighteenth Century, Didier, Paris, 1974, pp.10-12. With regard to the French contemporary cult for refined taste based on classicist concepts of the unities, "vraisemblance" and "bienséance" and the conflict with the new rising interest in the exploration of the meaning of "genius", "nature", "imagination" and "truth", cfr. R. Naves, Le Goût de Voltaire, Garnier, Paris, 1938, p.98:

Si nous voulons vers 1715, avoir une idée claire du classicisme française pensons que Racine va se heurter à Shakespeare, et que le véritable différend ne concernera pas l'observation humaine, aussi profonde de part et d'autre: il concernera le goût, c'est à dire le sens raffiné d'une bienséance, l'élégance et la noblesse qui, avec un parfait naturel, traduisent une civilisation. (quoted ibidem, pp.7-8).

ou plutôt dans la nature qu'il eut la hardiesse & le talent d'imiter, la connoissance, & les finesses d'un Art dont le but est si difficile à atteindre: de plaire aux hommes en les corrigeant!"). As to Shakespeare's well-known defects, they are to be ascribed to "les défauts du siècle", which are not to be taken into account "sans avoir égard à la différence des tems, des moeurs, & des usages". La Place fears that his translations may damage Shakespeare's reputation if:

l'on ne veut le juger que d'après la Poétique d'Aristote; si le sublime des idées, la grandeur des images, le feu de l'enthousiasme, la singularité des traits nouveaux & hardis, le naturel des sentiments disparaissent aux yeux des Lecteurs déjà fatigués par des Scenes hors d'oeuvre, choqués souvent par le manque de vraisemblance, & quelquefois ennuyés par des détails déplacés: si enfin, on croit devoir regarder avec mépris tout ce qui n'est pas frappé au coin de la politesse, & du gout epuré de notre siècle (p.VII).

La Place therefore warns his French readers not to look for an art so refined, domesticated and rarefied that all the living substance is lost, in the same way as food, when it is too refined, loses its nutritive principles. Besides, the fact that Shakespeare is so immensely popular in his own country must be an even greater stimulus for a "lecteur un peu Philosophe" towards enlarging his national outlook and discovering "la différence du génie Anglais, & du génie François".

Knowing the obstacles he is going to meet, La Place is very cautious in his presentation of Shakespeare and confesses: "Ce n'est qu'après (...) avoir longtemps hésité, que j'ai enfin osé hasarder, quoiqu'en tremblant, de faire parler François à Shakespeare". (pp.XIV-XV)

As regards the dramatic rules, La Place prefers not to expose himself personally and introduces some remarks supposedly made "par un Anglais éclairé" who explains that in the English theatre they are observed so long as they give pleasure, but if the result is boredom, they are to be rejected: "Je préfère la licence qui me réveille, à l'exactitude qui m'endort", and goes on:

Nous agissons (...) comme vous autres François, lorsque vous allez à la Comédie italienne, où vous ne portez point un esprit de critique par rapport à la contexture de la Pièce. Dès qu'un Arlequin vous fait rire, vous êtes contents? Dès que l'Auteur tragique nous attache, & nous réveille, tous les défauts sont pardonnés. (pp.XIX-XXI)

Another Italian reference is made by La Place concerning the reasons for the more lurid facets of Shakespeare's plays, where "le fer, le poison, les tortures, les rouës, les gibets, les enterrements, les farciens, les démons mêmes" appear on stage all the time. The right answer is given, in La Place's view, by Luigi Riccoboni, the founder of the Italian theatre in Paris³, who starts by noticing that "le fond du caractère des Anglois est de se plonger dans la rêverie (...) ils sont continuellement attachés à penser" therefore, if they were given tragedies in the French style, with their regular predictable plots, without any shocking or violent scenes, "les spectateurs s'endormiroient peut-être.". Implicitly La Place justifies in this way the introduction of "meurtres, (...) combats, (...) enterrements (...), empoisonnements", as due to necessity.

However, La Place's indulgence completely disappears when it comes to discussing Hamlet, and all his orthodox rationalistic aesthetic prejudices quickly re-emerge:

Quand Hamlet (...) occupé des plus grands intérêts, de sa vengeance, de son amour, & de la vie, vient sur le Théâtre se mêler à la conversation grossière, plaisante, & déplacée de deux Fossoyeurs l'on est révolté, & l'on doit l'être, parce que cet Episode choque la vérité du sentiment qui naît de la situation, de la condition, & de l'intérêt actuel des personnages (p.LXXVII).

Hamlet's feigned madness should have been represented "par des moyens plus nobles, plus simples et plus intéressants." There was no need, La Place goes on, that this madness

³Cfr. L. Riccoboni, Réflexions Historiques & Critiques sur les différens Théâtres de l'Europe, avec des pensées sur la Déclamation, Paris, 1738, pp.162-165. Riccoboni is particularly amazed by the fact that:

la Tragédie ait commencé en Angleterre par tout ce que l'imagination humaine peut suggérer de plus horrible.

Then, he illustrates his general statement that "Les Poëtes dramatiques Anglois ont ensanglanté la Scène au-delà de l'imagination" by giving Hamlet and Othello as typical examples. As to the former, he gives the following account of the plot in the purest Voltaireian style:

La Tragédie, qui a pour titre *Hamelet*, (1) a cinq Acteurs principaux, qui pendant l'action meurent tous de mort violente. Vers le milieu de la Pièce on voit l'enterrement d'une Princesse: on creuse la fosse sur la Scène, & l'on tire de terre des ossements & des crânes de cadavres: un Prince arrive, prend un crâne à la main, que le Fossoyeur lui dit être le crâne du Boufon de feu Roy, & ce Prince fait une dissertation de morale sur le crâne du Boufon, qui passe pour un chef d'oeuvre:

(1) Tragédie de *Shaskpear*

He is shocked by the fact that "les Spectateurs écoutent avec admiration, & à la fin applaudissent avec transport" Hamlet's speech upon the skull, and that this is "le morceau pour lequel la plus grande partie des Spectateurs va au Théâtre quand on représente cette Pièce". As P.S. Conklin remarks,

It is quite evident that this critic has no conception of, or sympathy for, the 'memento mori' tradition. And he cannot appreciate the lusty tragic appetite of a more masculine period. He can merely look on in shocked amazement. (op.cit., p.86)

lui fit tenir des propos durs & licentieux à sa mère & à sa maîtresse, ni qu'il feignât de prendre le premier Ministre caché sous la tapisserie pour un rat, afin d'être autorisé à le tuer, & à le faire impunément. (ibidem)

These scenes cannot be justified

dans aucun tems, ni dans aucun pays, parce qu'ils son contraires à la verité, à la raison, & aux bienséances générales, qui sont les mêmes par-tout" (ibidem).

In conclusion, if bloodshed and even supernatural elements on stage can be acceptable (in some cases), the lack of good taste in low comedy is unforgivable. As in Voltaire, La Place's attitude exemplifies the process taking place in French theatre, divided between two conflicting drives: attraction for Shakespeare's thrilling novelty and liveliness on the one hand, and a persistent clinging to the traditional cult of taste on the other.

La Place admits that Shakespeare "perd considérablement dans une traduction sur les morceaux sublimes" while those passages which might be considered by the French public "foibles, ridicules ou déplacés" (p.CXII) have been omitted in order that he might be spared negative criticism. His guiding principle has been "de crayonner par Analyse tout ce qui ne tend pas directement à l'action & (...) de m'arrêter sur toutes les Scènes, & sur toutes les situations susceptibles d'une traduction tolérable" (p.CX). One is left to wonder how much of Shakespeare was left after such treatment. From a more technical point of view, La Place's choice of "une prose mesurée, & parsemée de vers" (p.CXVI) also appears very debatable, as the result is a "mosaico informe cui nessun criterio presiede."⁴ Whatever its shortcomings, however, it cannot be denied that this translation played a very important role not only in France, but also in Italy, as the only available instrument for a first contact with Shakespeare, while encouraging, even if indirectly, the birth of a new kind of theatre.

The process of popularization of Shakespeare in France, which started with La Place's translations, reached a further stage with Garrick's visits to Paris in 1751 and 1763-65. The living presence of the famous English actor did more than any book to convey the idea of Shakespeare's greatness. Nevertheless such revelations were restricted to a cultural élite (professional writers, Encyclopaedists, rare adepts who had long been interested in Shakespeare) and did not reach a wide public. It was only with Jean-François

⁴Cfr. A Crinò, *op.cit.*, p.23.

Ducis' adaptation of Hamlet that Shakespeare finally reached the general public, in a performance at the Comédie-Française in September 1769⁵, which ran until 10th January 1770.

Ducis took very seriously the huge task of adapting (that is to say transforming, deforming, adding or omitting scenes) Hamlet according to current French taste.⁶ Without a knowledge of English he relied entirely on La Place's deformed version⁷, which he read in an escalation from enthusiasm for Shakespeare to an almost mystical exaltation, persuading himself that he could enter into the spirit of the author by some sort of magic. His naive good faith in what he was doing prevented him from realizing the mess he was making of the play, although the more shrewd among his contemporaries were quite aware of it. Diderot's definition of his version as "l'epouvantail de Ducis" to which even "le monstre de Shakespeare" was preferable became famous. Voltaire's opinion too, was unfavourable especially with regard to the use of the supernatural:

Vous avez sans doute vu *Hamlet*: les ombres vont devenir à la mode: j'ai ouvert modestement la carrière, on va y courir à bride abattue; *domandavo acqua, non tempesta*. J'ai voulu animer un peu le théâtre en y mettant plus d'action, et tout actuellement est action et pantomime; il n'y a rien de si sacré dont on n'abuse. Nous allons tomber en tout dans l'outré et dans le gigantesque; adieu les beaux vers, adieu

⁵Hamlet. Tragédie imitée de l'Anglois; par M. Ducis, représentée pour la première fois par les Comédiens François Ordinaires du Roi, le 30 septembre 1769 - A Paris - chez Gogué, Libraire, Quai des Augustins, près du Pont S. Michel - MDCCLXX.

⁶In April 1769 he confessed his problems to Garrick:

Je conçois, Monsieur, que vous avez dû me trouver bien téméraire de mettre sur la théâtre François une pièce telle qu'*Hamlet*. Sans parler des irrégularités sauvages dont elle abonde, le spectre tout avoué qui parle longtemps, les comédiens de campagne et le combat au fleurct, m'ont parus des ressorts absolument inadmissibles sur notre scène. J'ai bien regretté cependant de ne pouvoir y transporter l'ombre terrible qui expose le crime et demande vengeance. (Quoted in M. Monaco, op.cit., p.67)

⁷He acknowledged La Place's merits in his Avertissement prefaced to the play as follows:

Je n'entends point l'Anglois, & j'ai osé faire paraître *Hamlet* sur la Scène Française. Tout le monde connoît le mérite du Théâtre Anglois de M. de La Place. C'est d'après cet Ouvrage précieux à la littérature que j'ai entrepris de rendre une des plus singulières Tragédies de Sakespeare.

He went on praising Shakespeare in the usual Voltaireian terms and thanking Molé, the actor who had played the title role in the first stage version, for his effective interpretation:

On verra ce que j'ai emprunté de ce Poète si fécond, si pathétique et si terrible. On s'apercevra combien il étoit essentiel qu'un Acteur célèbre, récemment admiré dans les rôles de Beverley et de Saint-Albin, répandit sur celui d'*Hamlet* cette sensibilité touchante et cette vérité inimitable qui le caractérisent. Malgré ce que je dois à M. Molé, je ne paroîtrai suspect à personne en répétant ici, d'après tout le Public, qu'il a été aussi frappant & aussi neuf dans les scènes sombres & terribles, que tendre et enchanteur dans les scènes de nature et de sentiment.

les sentiments du coeur, adieu tout. La musique ne sera bientôt plus qu'un charivari italien, et les pièces de théâtre ne seront plus que des tours de passe-passe.⁸

By character and temperament, Ducis was prone to typically pre-Romantic traits such as love of nature, melancholy, love of solitude and this was probably one of the reasons for choosing Hamlet for his first adaptation.⁹

As a Northern hero Hamlet exemplified the strong 18th century predilection for the sentiments and lore of ancient Northern Europe, while in the case of Voltaire the choice of Julius Caesar as his first adaptation exemplified the 18th century interest in re-interpreting the political and philosophical ideas of ancient Rome.¹⁰ Shakespearian criticism has often emphasized the above reasons for the choice of these two tragedies as the first two adaptations of Shakespeare's works in France. Interestingly, the same choice was repeated in Italy (yet one more case of Italian cultural mimetic habits) by Domenico Valentini with his Giulio Cesare and Alessandro Verri with Hamlet for probably the same reasons, but of course with the crucial difference that they completed whole translations of the Shakespearian plays.

In accordance with Ducis' intention of changing Hamlet into a "pièce nouvelle", all violent events on stage are replaced with interminable narrative speeches and the original plot is systematically altered. Hamlet is a mad prince to be crowned king of Denmark ("Le prince furieux de ses cris effrayants fait retentir les lieux"), haunted by the Ghost of his murdered father who is seen only by him, and therefore never appears on the stage; he is in love with Ophélie, who is Claudius' daughter. Claudius, who has been Gertrude's instigator and accomplice in the murder of the king, plans to become king and marry Gertrude. The queen will not marry him because of remorse for her crime and duty to her

⁸Letter to D'Argental, 13th October 1769, Besterman ed., op.cit., XXXV, p.285.

⁹Other writers had previously attempted to adapt Hamlet for the French stage, as Bachaumont writes in his Mémoires secrets. London, 1783:

Ce sujet jusqu'ici avoit fait le désespoir de nos plus grands maîtres, qui avoient vainement tenté de l'adapter à notre théâtre et de le circonscrire dans nos règles dramatiques. Quelques-uns comme M. de Voltaire, s'étoient contentés d'en prendre les beautés de détail et de les transporter dans leurs pièces. M. Ducis (...) en a formé un drame régulier, mais qui, dénué de ces endroits neufs et terribles, dont on s'étoit emparé avant lui, n'a plus été qu'une tragédie ordinaire... (quoted in M. Monaco, op.cit., p.66)

¹⁰Cfr. M. Monaco, op.cit., pp.66-67.

son and right from the start, according to 18th century morality, she repents and wants to make amends for the murder. The relationship between Hamlet and Ophélie is tormented by the love-duty conflict,¹¹ they are both torn between these two alternatives, and in a highly melodramatic dialogue choose duty.¹² The first stage edition ended with two suicides (Claudius' and Gertrude's), which in later performances became two murders: Claudius murders Gertrude in a horrifying coup de théâtre, and "ouvre la porte de la chambre qui est au fond du Théâtre, on y découvre le corps sanglant de Gertrude à la clarté d'une lampe" (the lamplit scene with its aura of sombre romance was to become a stock stage effect in Shakespearian adaptations); after the backdrop appearance of Gertrude's blood-stained corpse, Hamlet promptly kills Claudius with his dagger. In contemporary criticisms of the play there was much divergence of opinions on both endings, but the public, attracted by the newness of the subject, remained enthusiastic.¹³

The most striking of Ducis' innovations is the invention of the urn scene which seems to be meant to replace Shakespeare's players' and closet scenes as Hamlet asks his

¹¹The Comelian background has a Rousseauian streak when Ophélie, horrified that her father wants to kill Hamlet, tries to dissuade him and "in Rousseau's language she suggests flight from human beings and a search for some wild, rocky shore where nature's storms are less frightening than the hearts of men." (Cfr. M. Monaco, *op.cit.*, p.70).

¹² HAMLET
...quand l'amour plus fort, enchaînant mon courroux.
Aux autels, malgré moi, me rendroit ton époux,
Du pied de ces autels reprenant ma colere,
De cette main bientôt j'irois venger mon pere,
Verser le sang du tien, t'en priver à mon tour,
Et servir la Nature en outrageant l'amour.

OPHELIE
Ah! tu m'as fait frémir. Va, tigre impitoyable,
Conserve, si tu peux, ta fureur implacable.
Mon devoir désormais m'est dicté par le tien;
Tu cours venger ton pere, & moi sauver le mien.
Je ne le quitte plus. De tes desseins instruite,
Je vais l'en informer, m'attacher à sa suite,
Jusqu'au dernier soupir lui prêter mon appui,
E s'il meurt, l'embrasser, & périr près de lui.
(Acte III - Scène II - pp.222-223)

As P.S. Conklin suggests, the melodramatic apostrophe "tigre impitoyable" may have been meant by Ducis to lend Hamlet a touch of the "sauvage" (*op.cit.*, p.92).

¹³Cfr. M. Monaco, *op.cit.*, p.76 "The public (...) remained enthusiastic once Ducis changed, on December 23, the last act. On the whole, the tragedy had a first run of twelve performances (...). The receipts, in general, were good."

mother to swear on the urn containing his father's ashes that she was not his murderer. In a great display of pathetic despair, Gertrude arouses such compassion in her sensitive son that he begs the Ghost to forgive her:

Hamlet
Arrêtez maintenant...
(*Il lui met l'urne entre les mains.*)

Gertrude
Eh bien...oui...moi...j'atteste...
Je ne puis plus souffrir un objet si funeste
(*Elle tombe sans connaissance sur un fauteuil*
Hamlet place l'Urne sur une table qui est à côté du fauteuil.)

Hamlet
Ma Mere!

Gertrude
Je me meurs!

Hamlet
Ah! revenez à vous,
Voyez un Fils en pleurs embrasser vos genoux:
Ne désespérez point de la bonté céleste.
Rien n'est perdu pour vous si le remord vous reste.
Votre crime est énorme, exécration, odieux;
Mais il n'est pas plus grand que la bonté des Dieux.
Chère Ombre, enfin, tes vœux n'ont plus rien à prétendre;
L'excès de ses douleurs doit apaiser ta cendre.
Tu la vois dans mes bras, elle est prête à périr:
Ses remords sont trop grands pour ne pas t'attendrir.
Pardonne, ou s'il te faut un sanglant sacrifice,
Je vais t'offrir fumant le cœur de son complice.
(Acte IV - Scène IV - pp.228-229)

No other scene could mark in a more striking way the distance between Saxo's and Shakespeare's (as well as Zeno's) stories, with their ferocious attack by Hamlet on Gertrude and this tearful, emotional hero, full of pity for his suffering mother.¹⁴

When this unrecognizable French pre-Romantic Hamlet was imported into Italy, it was the first one, after 31 years, to be staged after the native Italian Amleto.

¹⁴ As evidence of the particular state of mind of the period, reflected in all Shakespearian adaptations, cfr. a letter from Mrs. Riccoboni to Garrick, dated 27th July, 1772:

Nous sommes actuellement dans une fureur de *sensibilité* qui passe toute imagination; nos dames veulent pleurer, crier, étouffer aux spectacles. Les auteurs cherchent chez vous les pièces les plus tragiques, celles que vous rejetez [*sic.*]; ils en font des opéras comiques. Je ne désespère pas de voir le roi Lear en ariettes, ou Richard le Bossu en ballet pantomime. Le sentiment est la folie du jour, on se l'est mis si fort en tête qu'il en reste bien peu dans le cœur. (Quoted in M. Monaco, *op.cit.*, p.69)

Compared with La Place's version, Pierre Prime Félicien Letourneur's translations of Shakespeare¹⁵ are of an immensely higher quality. Letourneur's achievement was due to an impressive amount of research (he worked on all the best English editions of the period, and summarized their prefaces in the Discours des Préfaces, at the beginning of the first volume) basing it on very clear and conscientious ideas about translation which he exposed in his Avis sur cette traduction.

Letourneur starts by explaining what he means by a "Traduction exacte & vraiment fidèle", that is to say a copy respecting "l'ordonnance, les attitudes, les coloris, les beautés et les défauts du tableau". After a warning against literal translations which can in some cases be most unfaithful (he gives the example of many English words which, if translated literally into French, especially low and vulgar terms, sound much more dignified in English and have very bad connotations in French), he recognizes that it is impossible to reproduce Shakespeare's "beautés de mètre et d'harmonie imitative"; he assures that as many as possible of these effects have been saved by preserving the English construction of the sentences which had "plus d'énergie & de grâce que dans notre langue". On the other hand, less noble expressions have not been changed "pour conserver à l'original sa couleur, & au caractère sa vérité". Aware as he is of the difficulties of Shakespeare's texts¹⁶, which are so great that the English themselves have problems in understanding them, he will welcome any criticism having made all possible efforts to be as conscientious as possible.

In his introduction, Letourneur takes up the burning subject of Hamlet¹⁷, and attacks Marmontel's statements about the current English practice of abridging Hamlet adopted

¹⁵Shakespeare traduit de l'Anglois dédié au Roi,

Homo sum: Humani nihil a me alienum puto. Tér. Tome premier - MDCCLXXVI.

The complete works were published between 1776 and 1783, but only the first ten (Othello, La Tempête, Jules César, Coriolan, Macbeth, Roméo et Juliette, Hamlet, Antoine et Cléopâtre, Timon d'Athènes, Le Roi Jean) were published during Letourneur's lifetime.

¹⁶In this connection he uses the following picturesque metaphor: "...équivoques de la langue, qui sont comme un centre de plusieurs routes diverses, & souvent mêmes opposés. Dans ces obscurs labyrinthes, il est permis de s'égarer, sans courir le reproche d'ignorance." (p.CXL)

¹⁷Cfr. Voltaire's furious answer on the subject, supra, pp.85-86, "Voltaire".

even by Garrick, who had cut the gravediggers' scene as well as most of the fifth act and had received great applause from the English public.¹⁸ The real facts, in Letourneur's opinion, are as follows:

La vérité est, que ces retranchements ont pour principale cause, la nécessité de mesurer l'étendue des représentations sur la durée actuelle des Spectacles; qu'autrefois pour la rareté des plaisirs, & le jeu de commerce des deux sexes, les Spectacles remplissoient six à sept heures de la journée, tandis que de nos jours la multiplicité des occupations & des amusements les a bornés par-tout à l'espace de trois ou quatre heures; & que tandis qu'on essayoit sur le Théâtre de Garrick le Hamlet abrégé, la foule étoit au Théâtre de Covent Garden, où l'on jouoit le Hamlet entier. (p.XIII)

On the whole, the honest intentions of Letourneur's programme are not carried out concretely, and the result has generally been considered a mediocre and pale reflection of Shakespeare's glittering originals. However, it cannot be denied that Letourneur's translations were the most important turning-point in the history of Shakespeare reception not only in France, but also in Italy. As regards Hamlet in particular, after La Place's clipped and uninspired paraphrasis, and Ducis' strange theatrical mélange, in so far as Frenchmen (and Italians) of the late 18th century discovered the play, it was not on the stage, but in their libraries, from the pages of Letourneur.¹⁹

¹⁸In this connection, cfr. P.S. Conklin, op.cit., p.33:

It is common knowledge what happened when Garrick tried to change not his interpretation of the leading role, but the gravediggers' scene and the fencing-match between Hamlet and Laertes in the fifth act. In deference to pseudo-classical prejudice, he omitted them both. The result that might be expected followed. Tom Davies says: "The people soon called for Hamlet as it had been acted from time immemorial." Another revealing comment on Garrick's changes is: "No bribe but his own inimitable performance could have prevailed on an English audience to sit patiently and behold the martyrdom of their favourite author".

¹⁹P.S. Conklin sums up the English situation as follows:

Eventually, after the seventies, come the changes in interpretation that were motivated by perusal of Hamlet in the study. One logical terminal point for such a critical tendency comes early in the Nineteenth Century with Lamb, who was willing to banish Hamlet from the actual stage completely. Lamb would make him an actor on the stage which a reader may set up in his imagination. He wished no other Hamlet! (Cfr. P.S. Conklin, op.cit., p.33)

even by Garrick, who had cut the gravediggers' scene as well as most of the fifth act and had received great applause from the English public.¹⁸ The real facts, in Letourneur's opinion, are as follows:

La verité est, que ces retranchements ont pour principale cause, la nécessité de mesurer l'étendue des représentations sur la durée actuelle des Spectacles; qu'autrefois pour la rareté des plaisirs, & le jeu de commerce des deux sexes, les Spectacles remplissoient six à sept heures de la journée, tandis que de nos jours la multiplicité des occupations & des amusements les a bornés par-tout à l'espace de trois ou quatre heures; & que tandis qu'on essayoit sur le Théâtre de Garrick le Hamlet abrégé, la foule étoit au Théâtre de Covent Garden, où l'on jouoit le Hamlet entier. (p.XIII)

On the whole, the honest intentions of Letourneur's programme are not carried out concretely, and the result has generally been considered a mediocre and pale reflection of Shakespeare's glittering originals. However, it cannot be denied that Letourneur's translations were the most important turning-point in the history of Shakespeare reception not only in France, but also in Italy. As regards Hamlet in particular, after La Place's clipped and uninspired paraphrasis, and Ducis' strange theatrical mélange, in so far as Frenchmen (and Italians) of the late 18th century discovered the play, it was not on the stage, but in their libraries, from the pages of Letourneur.¹⁹

¹⁸In this connection, cfr. P.S. Conklin, op.cit., p.33:

It is common knowledge what happened when Garrick tried to change not his interpretation of the leading role, but the gravediggers' scene and the fencing-match between Hamlet and Laertes in the fifth act. In deference to pseudo-classical prejudice, he omitted them both. The result that might be expected followed. Tom Davies says: "The people soon called for Hamlet as it had been acted from time immemorial." Another revealing comment on Garrick's changes is: "No bribe but his own inimitable performance could have prevailed on an English audience to sit patiently and behold the martyrdom of their favourite author".

¹⁹P.S. Conklin sums up the English situation as follows:

Eventually, after the seventies, come the changes in interpretation that were motivated by perusal of Hamlet in the study. One logical terminal point for such a critical tendency comes early in the Nineteenth Century with Lamb, who was willing to banish Hamlet from the actual stage completely. Lamb would make him an actor on the stage which a reader may set up in his imagination. He wished no other Hamlet! (Cfr. P.S. Conklin, op.cit., p.33)

Alessandro Verri's Unpublished Translation of Hamlet

Verri's intellectual itinerary was rediscovered and its complexity more fully assessed only towards the middle of the present century. A far cry from the simplified univocal image which saw him as undergoing a sudden change of heart (after the revolutionary commitment of his youth at Il Caffé) that transformed him into an austere conservative moralist for the rest of his life in Rome, new aspects of his personality have come to light thanks to the studies of many contemporary Italian scholars (the first really important one being Walter Binni).¹ His multiple intellectual interests (the writing of history, the discovery of Shakespeare, the study of Greek, his interest in Alfieri's new tragedy) were tormented by his relentlessly severe self-censorship, which led him to leave most of his writings unpublished (including the translations of Hamlet and Othello).

However, the unexpected turn in his life towards seclusion was influenced by a pivotal event immediately on his arrival in Rome in 1767 after a long exciting journey to Paris and London: a tempestuous love affair with the fascinating married marquise Margherita Boccapadule Sparapani Gentili, which soon became a stable ménage, owing to which he kept delaying his return to Milan until he finally gave it up completely. Certainly life in Rome, where he had arrived as an ardent reformer, full of sarcasm and contempt for the torpid, reactionary "corte de' preti" contributed in changing him into a conformist and diffident moderate.

From a literary point of view Verri's political reversal induced him to retire from the real world of his time and take refuge in the world of classical Greek myths and ancient Roman ghosts, in an elaboration of classical antiquity which was at the same time permeated with the new melancholy and pathetic mood of the modern English graveyard poets. This strange experimental mixture proved a highly successful formula in the form

¹The latest of these studies is Fabrizio Cicoira's Alessandro Verri. Patron, Bologna, 1982, in which Verri's restless sensibility is seen as perpetually oscillating between a daring drive towards modern experimentation with new forms and the frustration he felt in his search for a classicist sense of balance. The ambivalence of his position is seen in the context of the crucial period going from the *Encyclopédie* to the French Restoration, with its conflicting social, political and intellectual tensions.

of novels which were exactly the product the reading public was ready to consume at that particular moment.

In his young years, Alessandro really embodied the process of Italian 18th century thought which, passing through Arcadian rationalism and taste flourished in the early Enlightenment and fought with energy for the radical restructuring of culture and society. When the moment of disillusionment came, after the glorious decade 1760/1770, and the hopes for total renewal were lost, various options were opened to the enlightened intellectuals of the Verri group. Either they could follow the maximalist trend towards revolution of imminent Jacobinism², or keep silent faith in old ideals while continuing to serve enlightened despotism with no hope of change (as in Pietro's case)³, or, as Alessandro did, seek consolation in that world of fantasy⁴ dominated by sentiment which was to lead to the Romantic era.⁵

Verri's translation of Hamlet is a peculiar case: it is historically the first complete translation into Italian of a dramatic Shakespearian text which was never published and never staged. The point of view of some current dramatic theories according to which a written dramatic text is to be considered merely as a hypothesis or blueprint for a theatrical realization, is inadequate in a case of this kind. The translator can only have taken the

²The French Revolution was to become the subject of a horrific account by Alessandro in his Vicende Memorabili dal 1789 al 1801, probably written in the first decade of the 19th century and published posthumously only in 1855. Alessandro's apocalyptic view of a "mondo assassinato dalla rivoluzione" reflected the typical position of the Catholic-inspired counter-revolutionary movement which saw the Revolution as the new original sin caused, like the first one, by human pride. This position was in sharp contrast with Pietro's opinions. Far from sharing his brother's execration, Pietro followed the French events with lively interest and in some cases sympathy, reacting harshly to his brother's counter-revolutionary commonplaces, and this conflict was to undermine their relationship (already compromised by economic matters) quite seriously.

³He held an important post as a civil servant in the Habsburg administration in Milan, while pursuing his interests in economics and philosophy at an extraordinarily high level.

⁴Cfr. M. Cerruti, *op.cit.*, p.79:

(...) Con più evidenza che altri scrittori, e nell'imminenza dei cruciali anni Novanta, Alessandro Verri contribuiva a fissare un dato (...) che si può accertare con particolare frequenza nell'esperienza di molti intellettuali fra ultimo Settecento e primo Ottocento, (...) passati attraverso un impegno storico-politico specialmente risentito: (...) un accentuarsi d'interesse per le cose letterarie, (...) una loro autonoma sperimentazione o fruizione.

⁵For a synthetic judgment on the political implications of Alessandro's choice, cfr. G. Trombatore, "I Romanzi di Alessandro Verri", Belfagor, anno XXIII, N.1, 31.1.1968, pp.46-49.

literary structure and literary values of the text into account and could not have seen the process of translation as implying a possible performance dimension with the several stages of decodification of the source text, and its rewriting in a target text with the ultimate goal of stage performance always in mind.⁶ What is surprising in this connection is that although Verri was particularly interested in the concrete practice of theatre⁷, he never thought of actually staging any work by Shakespeare, and this is in fact reflected in his translation strategies.

Being a great perfectionist, it is not surprising that, faced with the problem of translating Hamlet, Verri should feel that he was not equipped with adequate working instruments⁸ or he was not personally good enough for the task of translating such an obscure and complex play into Italian for the first time.

Alessandro informed Pietro about it in these terms:

Io, quest'inverno, tradussi quasi tutta la famosa tragedia di Shakespeare che ha il titolo: Hamlet, principe di Danimarca, ma essendomi venuti di mezzo altri studi, l'ho lasciato alla metà del quarto atto. Quest'autore è tanto difficile, che neppure la metà

⁶The problems of theatre translation have been discussed along these lines by Susan Bassnett (apart from her important book Translation Studies, Methuen, 1980) in the following articles: "Translating Spatial Poetry: An Examination of Theatre Texts in Performance", Literature and Translation, J.S. Holmes, J. Lambert, R. van den Broeck (eds.), Leuven, 1978; "The Translator in the Theatre", Theatre Quarterly N.40, London 1981; "Ways through the Labyrinth - Strategies and Methods of Translating Theatre Texts", The Manipulation of Literature, ed. T. Hermans, Croom Helm, 1985.

The same line of enquiry was pursued in my essay: "The hidden text: problems of translation in As You Like It", Palimpsestes, N.1, Service des publications - Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris III, 1987.

For the most up-to-date bibliography on the subject, cfr. Dramenübersetzung 1960-1985. Eine Bibliographie. Herausgegeben von Fritz. Paul und Brigitte Schultze, which is being issued periodically as a work-in-progress by a Nationally Funded Collaborative Research Center (Sonderforschungsbereich), Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, and is to be printed in its definitive form in 1991.

⁷Cfr. *supra*, p.34, "The Theatre Question".

⁸Verri is believed to have used both Pope's and Theobald's editions of Hamlet. This latter editor, starting the 18th century tendency to emendation, as well as to adverse criticism of coarse and obscene passages, was certainly not a very satisfactory critical source for Verri, neither was La Place's translation in Le Théâtre Anglois. Besides, Verri did not have at his disposal any glossary or critical analysis which might have clarified obscure passages or given him a clue to the meaning of lexical terms not included in the dictionaries. By way of dictionaries he used F. Altieri's Dictionary English and Italian containing all the words of the Vocabulary della Crusca and several hundred more taken from the most approved authors, London, 1726-1727, as well as Baret's Dictionary of the English and Italian Language, London, 1760 (In this connection he wrote to Pietro "Il dizionario del Baretto l'ho trovato eccellente anche in questa occasione", letter dated "Roma, 9 agosto 1769", Carteggio di P. e A. Verri, Vol. III, a cura di F. Novati e E. Greppi, Agosto 1769-Settembre 1770, Milano, Cogliati, 1911, pp.16-18).

degli Inglesi lo intendono bene, come pochi Italiani intendono Dante.⁹ E questo nasce dall'essere quell'inglese ripieno di frasi antiquate e di voci inusitate e talvolta composte da lui di sbalzo; di più vi si trovano molte parole prese dall'antico anglosassone. Con tutto ciò, mediante un'improba fatica, l'ho spiegato sufficientemente; ed è l'unica traduzione letterale che vi sia di questo autore, per quanto io so,¹⁰ perché nel *Théâtre Anglois*¹¹ se ne trovano de' squarci e tradotti con somma licenza. Io sono stato alla lettera precisa per dare una giusta idea della lingua e dell'autore. (Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 9 agosto 1769", Vol. III, op.cit., pp.16-18)

Verri was rather pessimistic about the possibility of a really good translation, being unable to understand the text perfectly. He was puzzled by Hamlet's strange behaviour and speech, and mistook for pure nonsense what was in actual fact a multilayered allusive language which was always suited to the situation¹², even though often in a concealed way. He had, however, very clear (and truly pre-Romantic) preferences for the more sensational and gloomy aspects of the play, along with a fascination for indefinite, mysterious, wide-ranging perspectives:

I squarci che a me piacciono singolarmente sono il monologo di Amleto "Essere, o non essere questa è la questione", la di lui scena con la madre dove gli rimprovera la morte del marito, agli squarci dei commedianti alla morte di Priamo - la scena fra l'ombra e il figlio e le ultime parole di Amleto moribondo ad Orazio¹³.

He had started work driven by great enthusiasm for the author he had learned to admire during his stay in Paris and later in London; above all he admired the naturalness,

⁹In a letter to Pietro, dated "Roma, 18 giugno 1777", Vol.IX, op.cit., a cura di G. Seregini, Dal 1^o aprile 1777 al 30 giugno 1778, A. Milesi e figli, Milano 1937, pp.62-63, he again made the same comparison: "Figurati che sono come squarci oscuri di Dante dove né noi, né i forastieri, né i commentatori intendiamo nulla."

¹⁰It is not clear whether Verri meant that his translation was the only Italian translation of *Hamlet* or the only Italian Shakespearian translation (which would have implied that he did not know about Domenico Valentini's translation of *Julius Caesar*) or, even, the only literal Shakespearian translation into any language.

¹¹Cfr. letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 7 maggio 1777", ibidem, p.35: "Si ritrova nel Teatro inglese stampato a Parigi questa tragedia tradotta in francese ma in verità con mutilazioni e contrassegni infiniti."

¹²Cfr. Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 18 giugno 1777", Vol.IX, op.cit., pp.62.-63

Quanto ai passi oscuri, essi lo sono talmente che il darne la traduzione sarebbe un porre molte parole in fila che non vogliono dire niente e che non darebbero né piacere né istruzione alcuna. (...) I finti deliri di Amleto spesso non hanno senso perché parla da pazzo. Quando questo delirio è lungo e che non sono altro che parole, io l'ho troncato e mi sono tenuto a quel che deve parere delirio agli altri attori, ma non allo spettatore che ne intende la allusione. Ofelia pure canta certe vecchie canzoni, dove non se ne può intendere una sillaba. Polonio ancora parla da vecchio rimbambito, e spesso con giochi di parole e tutto questo non si può tradurre.

¹³Cfr. ibidem.

the strength, the sincerity of Shakespeare's style¹⁴, that contrasted with the artificiality of French playwrights¹⁵. Although he appreciated their great technical ability, he criticized their monotonous rhyming metrics, their prolixity, the pre-eminence of the aural over the visual elements in their plays ("dialoghi per l'orecchio, piuttosto che azioni per l'occhio"), but he recognized that notwithstanding these faults,

¹⁴Cfr. Letter to Pietro, dated "Roma, 27 maggio 1779", Vol.X. a cura di G. Seregni, Dal 1^o luglio 1778 al 29 dicembre 1779, Milano, A. Giuffrè, 1939, p.281:

Quanto a me sono rapito dalla forza e verità delle sue passioni ed accanto a lui che scorre quasi un fiume a piene acque, gli altri tragici mi sembrano limpidi ruscelli. (...) Convengo però ch'è un libro da leggersi e da studiarsi quando è formato il gusto su modelli perfetti, altrimenti si rischierebbe di imitarlo dove non si deve. (...) I bei momenti (di Shakespeare) sono di una forza, di un moto, di una violenza, di una verità, e spesso ancora così nuovi che eccitano un senso più vivo di ammirazione e simpatia.

One feels that it is really a Romantic ahead of his time who is writing here.

¹⁵Alessandro even advocated French opinions on the subject, such as the following one (held by a French tragic actress met in Paris in 1766): Cfr. Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 30 settembre 1778", ibidem, p.89:

Mlle Clairon (...) diceva che per una scena di esso (Shakespeare) avrebbe dato tutto il teatro francese. Naturalmente esagerava parlando con qualche inglese, ma non aveva tutto il torto nel fondo della cosa, perché egli è una vasta miniera che sorprende!

Earlier on he had dwelt on the same subject in a letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 27 agosto 1777", Vol.IX, op.cit., pp.114-115:

Quest'autore mostra la vera strada della natura e dopo d'averlo letto si trovano troppo artificiosi gli eroi del teatro francese (...). Io ti replico che quest'autore ti trasporta. Egli è vero pittore della natura, gli altri sono manierati, questo dipinge sempre col nuovo avanti agli occhi. Generalmente nel teatro inglese vi è più semplicità a naturalezza e si sono seguite le di lui tracce.

Here Alessandro was answering a letter from Pietro, who had just finished reading *Julius Caesar*, and had expressed his enthusiasm in the following terms:

Se la cosa non è accaduta così almeno poteva così accadere e gli storici direbbero quello che hanno detto. Il costume è così naturale che incanta. Gli eroi si dipingono come sono, non ampollosamente giganteschi come fanno i Francesi!

But Pietro's analysis went deeper into the matter, well beyond a generic comparison:

Egli non fa mai i caratteri degli attori sfacciatamente chiari: vi resta sempre una nebbia; i Francesi, al contrario, dalle prime parole che pronunzia un attore ti danno a conoscere decisamente quale sia il di lui carattere.

Through his sharp critical insight, Pietro could penetrate one of the most fascinating qualities of Shakespeare's treatment of his characters, the indefinite, problematic side of their psychology:

Dove è al mondo l'uomo che si manifesti con tanta facilità? Dov'è l'uomo che trattato anche per un mese di seguito ti dia una decisa sicurezza che è il carattere, che può o non può fare la tale azione? Una dose di debolezza è la sola che entra in tutti gli impasti d'ogni uomo, questa fa sempre che e il virtuoso e il pessimo restino un passo indietro e nel bene e nel male o vi camminino con vacillante incertezza; l'inglese ha conosciuto questo impasto e te lo ha posto sul teatro, onde la maggior parte dei suoi personaggi non gli puoi decisamente chiamare buoni o cattivi se non al calare del sipario dalle loro azioni, come alla morte della maggior parte degli uomini solamente si può decidere se siano stati più buoni che cattivi. Aggiungo che pochi uomini sogliono avere decisi principi generali delle azioni loro e non si conoscono bene loro stessi; perciò il teatro francese mi mostra gli uomini lontani da quello che realmente sono.

As a conclusion, Pietro used a very effective metaphor taken from painting:

Io non biasimo le opere di Cornelio, di Racine, di Voltaire; no, mi fanno intenerire, mi istruiscono, m'inflammo alla virtù, ma hanno l'inverisimiglianza di essere un quadro di colori tutti decisi e primigenii e gli oggetti sempre la natura gli offre a mezze tinte. (Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 20 agosto, 1777" Vol.IX, op.cit., p.110).

One can feel here that the typical Enlightenment preference for clarity and definite, hard outlines is slowly being replaced by an already Romantic craving for the indefinite, the soft, the uncertain.

sono i più grandi maestri dell'arte, e in complesso finora il vero teatro è il francese. Ma chi sa ben discernere anche in autori irregolari le vere strade del sublime, può acquistare un nuovo colorito e sembrare originale ed esserlo in gran parte, come ha fatto Corneille imitando gli spagnoli, e Voltaire imitando greci, spagnoli, italiani, ed inglesi, essendo stato il Proteo di ogni stile¹⁶.

This was a truly avant-garde position in a country where a taste for France and passion for Voltaire were so dominant and Verri was convinced that appreciation of Shakespeare would be difficult to achieve in Italy, if ever he was to become popular at all.¹⁷

¹⁶Cfr. Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 27 maggio 1779", Vol.X, op.cit., p.282. However, his admiration for Voltaire's technical ability as a playwright did not prevent Alessandro from noticing his defects as a translator and, above all, his "parti pris" against Shakespeare:

Ho veduto che Voltaire o non sa bene questa lingua, o ha voluto a tutt'i costi mettere in ridicolo Shakespeare. Ma a torto, perché con tutte le sue stravaganze è un grand'uomo. (Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 9 agosto 1769", Vol.III, op.cit., p.17)

¹⁷Cfr. Letter to Pietro, dated "Roma, 27 maggio 1779", Vol.X, op.cit., p.281.

Credo che quest'autore avrà pochi ammiratori forastieri perché nella traduzione perde quanto può perdere la poesia, cioè una buona metà, consistente nelle elocuzioni, nel metro de' suoi versi affatto originali, ora per la grandezza ora per la facilità, e finalmente per una straordinaria invenzione di modi nuovi d'esprimersi da lui ritrovati nella sua lingua.

A year later he wrote on the same subject:

(...) Non spero però di avere molti confratelli in questa ammirazione, massimamente in Italia, perché il core nostro sente molto la musica e la poesia amorosa, e poco le altre passioni di un genere superiore, come la gloria, l'onore della patria, e gl'illustri delitti, perché non siamo né cittadini, né gloriosi, né grandi scellerati. Amen. (Letter to Pietro, dated "Roma, 23 giugno 1779" Ibidem, p.301-302).

The same feeling of being isolated in the admiration for Shakespeare in the context of the Milanese (and national) cultural world can be detected in the following letters from Pietro:

Io leggo con sentimento la traduzione di questo autore, che non piace a nessuno di quanti ho interrogati e che m'interessa il cuore. Bisogna dire che noi due abbiamo un modo di sentire differente da quello de' nostri Italiani. Essi si accontentano delle cose anche mediocri purché non abbiano difetti; noi troviamo piacere ne' tratti grandi, belli, energici, collocati in mezzo anche ai difetti. (Letter to Alessandro dated: "Milano, 19 maggio 1779" Vol.X, op.cit., p.276.)

Io non conosco un uomo solo a cui piaccia Shakespeare; non a Carli, non a Beccaria; noi due soli siamo di questo umore. (Letter to Alessandro, dated "Milano, 20 maggio 1780", Vol.XI, op.cit., a cura di G. Seregni, Dal 1^o gennaio 1780 al 26 maggio 1781 p.72.)

An effective illustration of the anti-Shakespearian feeling among 18th century Italian classicists can be found in the following passage from Saverio Bettinelli, "Sopra lo studio delle belle lettere e sul gusto moderno di quelle", an essay prefacing the first volume of his Opere. Zatta, Venezia 1780, in which Bettinelli stresses the danger that the right notion of poetry may be lost since things have gone so far that comparisons between Shakespeare and Racine are beginning to be made:

(...) i depravatori moderni del buon gusto (...) ardiscono preferire Skaspear a Racine, e (...) gl'Inglese (...) osano censurar questo tragico illustre senza intendere quello stile sì eccellente, e quel maneggio delle passioni sì delicato, sì tenero, sì maraviglioso (...) è uno scandaloso corrompimento di gusto il sol paragonare lo stil duro e plebeo di Skaspear con quella purità ed eleganza di Racine; l'avvilire la continua nobiltà, delicatezza, proprietà de' termini di questo, e il suo verso corretto, armonico e fluido, e l'intelligenza profonda del cuor umano espressa con tanta grazia e con tal patetico movimento, e l'esaltar l'Inglese pien d'immagini basse, di sconci obbietti, di vili o buffonesche espressioni, oltre la stravaganza, l'incoerenza, la contrarietà degli affetti, dell'idee, de' caratteri, e perché ciò? Perché ha delle scene sublimi e delle situazioni terribilissime, e perché di un gusto tutto inglese e nulla francese. Ma dunque assaporisi in Inghilterra quanto si vuole, ma non venga in Francia a guastar l'indole della lingua, il teatro, lo stile (...).

At the same time, Verri was deeply dissatisfied with the French material on Shakespeare he had at his disposal, that is to say, La Place's translation and Ducis' adaptation and blamed their tendency (which on the other hand was English as well as French) to "mend the faults" of Shakespeare's plays, according to their personal taste.¹⁸

Coherently with these ideas his own personal attitude to Shakespeare always remained that of a diligent, hardworking and modest craftsman, whose only aim was the greatest possible faithfulness to the original, and he repeatedly pointed out to his brother his great commitment to this task.¹⁹

Voltaire's influence, however, was so universally pervasive that not even Shakespeare's warmest admirer in Italy could escape it completely. Alessandro's judgments were not wholly free from the Voltaireian prejudice that saw Shakespeare as a

Another characteristic of the anti-Shakespearian party was their appreciation for modern English authors, compared by Bettinelli to those of ancient Greece ("gente più penserosa, e spesso ancor malinconica, che conserva tuttavia l'ardir della libertà, la forza della ragione, l'impeto degli affetti profondi e sublimi, congiungendoli co' tumulti, colle discordie, coll'irrequietezza perpetua, onde sembra rappresentare la Grecia antica"). These English authors portrayed "de' Bruti moderni e de' Catoni, ed altri quadri immortali, quai li veggiamo in Ossian, in Milton, in Richardson, in Thompson, e ne' loro concittadini più illustri" (quoted in *Illuministi italiani*, op.cit., p.992).

Lastly, Bettinelli, as a typical representative of the anti-Shakespearians, was in the first rank in the battle against the Irishman Martin Sherlock, one of Shakespeare's greatest admirers, who had come to Italy in 1778, starting an intensive canvassing on behalf of his beloved author. His fanatically pro-Shakespearian works (*Consiglio ad un giovane poeta*, Napoli, 1780; *Lettres d'un voyageur anglois*, 1781) were harshly critical of Italian and French classicist authors. Many polemical answers were given to him and Bettinelli's was among them (Cfr. "Discorso sopra la poesia italiana", *Illuministi italiani*, op.cit., pp.1059-1060). Sherlock, on the other hand, explained his dedication to Shakespeare's cause, in the following rather humorous terms:

I should not have said so much upon Shakespeare if, from Paris to Berlin, from Berlin to Naples, I had not heard his name profaned. The words monstrous farces and gravediggers have been repeated to me in every town, and for a long time I could not conceive why everyone uttered precisely these two words and not a third. One day, happening to open a volume of Voltaire the mystery was solved: the two words in question were found in that volume and all the critics had learned them by heart.

The above passage from *Fragment on Shakespeare* is quoted by Lacy Collison-Morley, op.cit., pp.17-18, who comments: "Sherlock was travelling nearly half a century after the words first appeared in print and it was almost half a century more before they had become meaningless."

¹⁸Cfr. Letter to Pietro, dated: "Roma, 9 aprile 1777" Vol.IX, op.cit., p.14,:

Se i traduttori fossero stati così fedeli, la opinione che si ha di Shakespeare sarebbe più giusta perché le traduzioni fatte fin ora sono soltanto perifrasi ed estratti, dove chi ha raccolto i passi sublimi lasciando i difettosi, chi ha raccolto soltanto i ridicoli lasciando i sublimi.

¹⁹Letter to Pietro, dated: "Roma, 7 maggio 1777" ibidem, p.35, "

Ardisco assicurarti, che su questa traduzione, vedi in trasparenza l'autore e che ne hai una esatissima idea.

Later on, in the same year he wrote to Pietro: "Roma, 19 giugno 1777",

Egli è certo che non abbiamo in Italia una traduzione così fedele. Ibidem, p.65.

mixture of monstrous and sublime elements²⁰ and the same applied to Pietro's

20

- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 9 aprile 1777", Vol.IX, op.cit. p.14: "quel sorprendente mostro di bellezze e di difetti"; "ricca miniera ma impura"; "gli squarci nobili che sono molti, sono il punto più elevato della poesia ed i (...) difetti hanno pure una certa stranezza e meraviglia che indica essere parti di un ingegno straordinario".
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma 11 giugno 1777", ibidem, p.58: "stranissimo e sublime scrittore".
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 23 agosto 1777", ibidem, p.111: "Insomma è un autore pieno di difetti, ma da cui ogni sorte di poesia può ricavare tesori come ricchissima miniera di ogni stile e di ogni passione".
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 10 giugno 1778", ibidem, p.312: "talmente interessante nell'alto e nel basso che eclissa ogni altro".
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 30 settembre 1778", Vol.X, op.cit., p.89: "...sai quanto sono trasportato da quest'autore di cui si suol dire che è insuperabile nelle bellezze e nelle pazzie".

judgments also.²¹

The extraordinary long-distance dialogue between the two brothers²² offers a unique opportunity for following the secret, very private itinerary along which knowledge of and appreciation for Shakespeare had to go in the second half of the 18th century, before it became accessible to the general reading public and was finally hailed triumphantly with the establishment of the Romantic movement in the first decades of the 19th century.

One cannot help thinking that if Verri's translation had appeared in print, the history of Shakespeare reception in Italy would have developed in a much more positive way. It is to be regretted that such a wonderful opportunity for making Shakespeare known in a correct form earlier than in any other European country was missed. And it was missed not for any objective difficulty, but simply owing to a subjective impulse of Alessandro's. His peculiar character led him to delay and finally refuse publication of many of his writings (including the translations of *Hamlet* and *Othello*) under various pretexts. From what can be gathered from his letters, his underlying motive was always the same: an almost pathological lack of self-confidence²³ when it came to making his work known to the public, which resulted in severe self-censorship along with a change in his political and literary opinions, away from the revolutionary extremism of his youth. In addition to all this, Alessandro was strongly discouraged from publishing his own Shakespearian

²¹In a letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 17 ottobre 1778", *ibidem*, op.cit., p.106, Pietro used the typical Voltairean approach in a comparison of distinctively Milanese flavour:

Vorrei che l'Italia, che ha tanta superiorità nei drammi in grazia del Metastasio, avesse cosa da bilanciare le tragedie francesi; non dirò le inglesi, perchè anch'io trovo Shakespeare paragonabile all'architetto del nostro Duomo, grande, ardito, stravagante, e barbaro; ha però dei pezzi divini accanto alle pazzie.

It must not be forgotten however, that the same attitude could also be found in England. As P.S. Conklin observes:

The "Beauties-Faults" type of criticism is a distinct eighteenth century genre. It can be said to owe its origin, partly to the separatist tendency that reduced the dramatic texture to a "series of deep reflections"; and partly to another neo-classical habit, the pointing out in Shakespeare of a number of "defects", most of them violations of decorum. The "beauty-blemish cant" as one writer calls it, is plainly evident in Dryden and Dennis, for example; and many traces of it are found throughout the Eighteenth century. (Cfr. P.S. Conklin, op.cit., pp.45-46.)

²²Cfr. *Appendix III*.

²³What may have reinforced this peculiarity of his character, in Crinó's opinion *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare...*, op.cit., p.68, was the complete failure of his translation of the *Iliad*, published in 1789, after lying in a drawer for eighteen years and after almost as many years of painstaking work.

translations by the appearance of those by Letourneur. In view of this Pietro, who had suggested publication in the first place, also agreed that it was pointless to go on with his long-overdue plan.²⁴

The status of Verri's translation as a literary product, if considered in Jakobsonian terms²⁵, can be defined as a sender-receiver relationship (which in the case of translation forms a double chain, the translator acting successively as receiver and sender) in which the terminal end, the receiver of the translated text is missing (except for some very near relatives)²⁶. In Jaussian terms it could be defined as an example of production without reception: as a result, no immediate impact on Italian literature could take place and the only influence Verri's Shakespearian translations could have was an indirect one.

Verri started his translation of Hamlet²⁷ on "8 Genaro 1769" (this date appears in very small characters at the top of the first page of the first draft of the translation), but after many, in some cases very long interruptions²⁸, it was completed at the beginning of March 1777. Three different versions of Verri's unpublished translation of Hamlet exist today

²⁴For the Verri brothers' debate on publication, cfr. Appendix III.

²⁵Cfr. my essay, "Proposta per un'applicazione della teoria della comunicazione di Jakobson al processo di traduzione del testo letterario", in C. De. Stasio, I critici e la cultura. Opera Universitaria, Milano, 1982.

²⁶ Cfr. Appendix IV. The only probable reader outside the family, mentioned by Pietro, was the Royal Archduchess, wife to Ferdinand of Habsburg. Cfr. Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 24 giugno 1778", Vol.IX, op.cit., p.329: "Ieri ho consegnato l'Hamlet a chi lo umilierà alla R. Arciduchessa; è ben trascritto; ella ha gustati i due volumi della traduzione francese e credo che avesse curiosità di leggere questa celebre composizione teatrale."

²⁷For a detailed examination of the translation from a linguistic point of view, cfr. A.M. Crinò Le traduzioni di Shakespeare... op.cit., pp.64-77 and S. Colognesi, "Shakespeare e Alessandro Verri", ACME. Vol.16, Fasc. 2-3, Maggio 1963.

²⁸The second act was finished on 5.3.1769. The third act was started on 16.3.1769. The fourth act was started on 11.4.1769 but was interrupted half-way through, and an explanatory note said: "lasciato in aprile del 1769 per lo studio del Greco, e ripreso li 24 marzo 1772, cioè dopo un triennio". Work was resumed, but soon interrupted again, this time for a period of five years. Another note explains: "Ripigliato li 3 marzo 1777 al Casino della Marchesa". After only four days, on 7th March, the translation was finally completed at the country house ("Casino") of his lady friend, the marquise Margherita Boccapadule Sparapani Gentili, to Verri's great relief, as we can see from this little note following the word "Fine": "fatica penosa per le difficoltà del testo orribili" (he repeatedly expressed the same opinion in his letters, as in the following: "...l'originale è di una difficoltà ributtante e pochi anche degli Inglesi lo intendono veramente bene". Letter to Pietro, dated "Roma, 7 maggio 1777", Vol.IX, op.cit., p.35).

(hereafter to be referred to as V1, V2 and V3), but they are not accessible for public reading.²⁹

The first version has 71 sheets (only the first two of which are numbered). On the first page under the above-mentioned date there is the title, "Hamlet Principe di Danimarca Tragedia di Shakespeare", followed by the list of characters, whose names are all Italianized except for Fortinbras, Hamlet (spelled Hamelet in this version), Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Osric (spelled Osrick). The phrase "La scena è in Elsinoor" follows in the same paragraph. The text starts on the following line with the cues succeeding one another without any division. The division into acts and scenes is indicated, but only the first scene is numbered. This version is almost a crib³⁰, following the original text meticulously word by word; it is written in very small, rather untidy handwriting, with many erasures; the lines which Verri intends to omit in V2 are underlined. Frequently, personal comments of various kinds are put in brackets and are included in the body of the text; they are omitted in V2 and V3. A very good instance of the variety and scope of these comments can be found in the Osric episode (Hamlet, V.ii.81-180, pp.398-404; V1, pp.63-65, my own numbering)³¹. On Osric's entrance, Hamlet asks Horatio: "Dost know this water-fly?" and Verri translates: "Conosci tu (a Orazio) questa mosca d'acqua?", quoting also the English original (underlined) "this water-fly", as if to make the matter clearer³². As Horatio does not know Osric, Hamlet gives him some ironic information: "Thy state is the more gracious, for 'tis a vice to know him. He hath much land and fertile. Let a beast be lord of beasts and his crib shall stand at the king's mess. 'Tis a chuff but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt." Verri is, justifiably, quite baffled and underlines

²⁹They belong to a rich collection of Verri papers, the Archivio Verri, which has been donated to the Mattioli Foundation, and is temporarily located at Banca Commerciale, Milan.

³⁰After the monologue of the III act, Verri writes: "La traduzione è precisamente una parola dopo l'altra come il testo".

³¹A particularly obscure scene, requiring no less than five full pages of footnotes in Jenkins' edition: it is no wonder that Verri had so many doubts about it.

³²Cfr. the passage from the absolutely literal translation to a more generic one in V2 and V3: "Conosci tu, a Orazio, questo insetto?"

the word-for-word translation, which he will eliminate in the next versions: "Il tuo stato è il più grazioso, perché egli è un vizio di conoscerlo". Then he goes on: "Egli ha molto terreno e fertile; sia una bestia padrona di altre bestie, e la sua mangiatoia starà alla piattanza del Re."³³ The next sentence is translated according to a controversial interpretation (rejected by Jenkins), reading "chough" instead of "chuff"³⁴, and an explanation of the lexical term is given in brackets: "questo è una Pola (uccello detto anche mulacchia)"; the definition of Osric's possessions is also problematic: "Ma come io dico spazioso nel possesso del fango" and Verri despondently adds in brackets: "(oscuro come si vede assai)". All these lines are cut in the later versions, well illustrating Verri's tendency to leave out all he could not account for.

After a joke about Osric not wearing his hat because of the heat, Hamlet starts mocking him much in the same way as he had done with Polonius on the subject of the clouds:

OSRIC:
...it is very hot.
HAMLET:
No, believe me, 'tis very cold the wind is northerly.
OSRIC:
It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.
HAMLET:
But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion.
OSRIC:
Exceedingly, my lord, it is very sultry - as 'twere - I cannot tell how.

Verri's translation is absolutely literal: "Osrick:...fa molto caldo. Ham: no credetemi fa freddo. Il vento è di tramontana. Osrick: in verità mio signore egli è un freddo tollerabile. Ham: ma mi pare ancora che sia un caldo smanioso per il mio temperamento. Osrick: eccessivamente smanioso mio Signore, come ciò succeda io non saprei dirle."; at this point a significant critical comment is added in brackets "(accorda tutto con adulazione)". Finally, Osric comes to the point and informs Hamlet in his typical highfalutin diction of the King's bet in his favour in a duel to be fought against Laertes, but

³³In the later versions the translation is modified as follows: "Egli ha molti terreni e bestiami. Quando una bestia è padrona di altre bestie la sua mangiatoia può stare insieme alla tavola reale".

³⁴Cfr. Jenkins, op.cit., p.559, "a country fellow of more wealth than worth" implying the paradox of riches possessed by one unfit to have them.

first he engages in a list of Laertes' excellencies culminating in: "Indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry; for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman would see." Verri translates as follows:

Invero a parlare di lui con tatto egli è il cardo (strumento da cardare la lana) o il calendario della nobiltà, perché voi troverete in lui il continente di qualunque dote (parte) un gentiluomo volesse vedere.

The misunderstanding of "card"³⁵ is left out in V2 and V3 as Verri was probably aware that he had made some sort of blunder there; the underlined passage is replaced in V2 and V3 by: "perché in lui trovate qualunque dote si voglia", another typical example of Verri's outright elimination of metaphoric language in order to avoid all risks of obscurity.

The dialogue goes on using the same kind of very complex prose language as Hamlet with his typical fondness for parody mockingly imitates Osric's affected speech, and Verri continues to emit sad expressions of helplessness in brackets: "(noterò che in alcune edizioni sono state omesse queste oscurità perché veramente come a me al (sic) editore parvero insuperabili); later on Verri quotes only the English original, just to prove how obscure it is: "(passo così oscuro che qui voglio mettere senza traduzione: dice dunque prima Osrick: I know you are not ignorant. Ham: i would, you did, Sir, yet, in faith, if you did, it would not much approve me...Well Sir). After the above purely lexical or morphological, or psychological comments Verri almost borders on literary criticism when he points out after Osric's elaborate speech describing the sword hangers referred to as "carriages" ("Three of the carriages, in faith, are very dear to fancy, very responsive to the hilts, most delicate carriages, and of very liberal conceit"); "(frasi preziose, giochi di parole oscurissimi)" and again before the end of the episode, when Osric explains a preceding phrase of his ("And it would come to immediate trial if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer") as follows: "I mean, my lord, the opposition of your person in trial", Verri comments: "(oscurissimo, ma si noti che Osrick parla sempre con spropositi di affettazione)".

³⁵Jenkins gives the figurative meaning of model or paradigm for the literal one of "map" (card) and "directory" (calendar).

The second version (V2), of 75 sheets, has the title and the list of characters in the first page; the indication "La scena è in Elsinoor" is towards the bottom of the page in a single line. This version has undergone massive intervention (changes in lexical terms, in sentence construction, omissions, simplifications) which has transformed the text considerably. The abiding preoccupation with the source language in V1 has now given way to the reverse preoccupation with the target language in the second. The handwriting has grown imperceptibly bigger and there are only few erasures; there is a somewhat clearer division between acts and scenes.

The third and final version (V3) of 124 sheets, is an exact copy of V2 so far as the text is concerned. The only real difference is its external appearance: the handwriting has now become large and clear (and very beautiful, too). The divisions between cues, acts and scenes are carefully shown and the scenes are accurately numbered. The first page contains only the title, the second page contains the list of characters and the indication of place. On the whole, this transcription seems to have been prepared for the printer with a view to publication which, however, never materialized.

It is a fascinating experience to go through the three versions and see the process of translation taking place as an "in vitro" experiment: from the fluidity of the crudely ebullient first stage recalling the melting of metal, through the conceptual and formal manipulation of the second stage, on to the final third stage where the ultimate Italianized form has solidified and the slags have been eliminated from the polished and glittering finished product.

Although Verri understood Shakespeare's reasons for alternating prose and verse³⁶, he chose to adopt only prose, first because he knew he was "un pessimo poeta" and secondly because prose left him "tutta la libertà di seguire il senso letterale e la vera natura della lingua inglese, che ha molte analogie con la nostra"³⁷; in the case of Shakespeare he

³⁶"Il testo è parte in prosa, e parte in versi, come tutte le tragedie di quell'autore, il quale fa parlare in verso i caratteri nobili e in prosa i plebei, e posto che mescola gli uni e gli altri nelle tragedie, aveva ragione di fare tal differenza nel loro stile. Il re di Danimarca può declamare in versi, ma i beccamorti devono parlare in prosa posto che ci sono." (Letter to Pietro dated "Roma 7 Maggio 1777", Vol.IX, op.cit., p.35).

³⁷Ibidem.

thought this analogy was even more accentuated as he, like almost all great English poets, "aveva gran lettura degl'Italiani e gl'imitava, e per conseguenza vi è grande analogia fra di essi e specialmente i nostri Secentisti".³⁸

However, all this did not help Verri in finding the text of *Hamlet* any less baffling or, at times, desperately obscure. As a typical representative of the 18th century tendency to clarity, simplicity and fluency, he did not think twice about simply eliminating whatever he regarded as interference. It is interesting to compare this attitude, due to an overscrupulous fear of his style becoming too involved and therefore obscure, thus preventing the original message from coming through in the most faithful way, with the wilful determination of Voltaire in cutting out anything that might have placed Shakespeare in a better light in the eyes of the French public.

In order to illustrate Verri's style as a translator, three different examples have been selected: a narrative passage, a monologue and a dialogue. All three show Verri's most characteristic qualities: a good understanding of the text associated with a very radical way

³⁸Cfr. letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 9 aprile, 1777", *Ibidem*, p.14. The general analogy he saw between the English and the Italian language was one of Alessandro's favourite topics and he frequently wrote about it in his letters. He also tended to stress the superiority he thought the Italian language had over the French in the field of Shakespearian translation:

La lingua francese non è molto adatta per questo (Shakespearian translation). Il colorito di quest'autore è ardito, esagerato, strano: è la natura che parla, ma una natura rozza, senza delicatezza e modi sociali: la lingua francese è legata nella sua sintassi, deve sempre avere il buon tono non ammette frasi e traslati meravigliosi, tutto va in linea retta, senza disordine: non è così organizzata la nostra lingua: in essa ognuno può farsi uno stile, un colorito, una sintassi. (...)Credo che tutto questo ci dia un vantaggio per tradurli, e di fatti gli Inglesi convengono che la nostra lingua è la più adatta alla traduzione de' loro autori. (Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 9 aprile 1777" Vol.IX, op.cit., p.14).

He took up the subject again, on receiving Letourneur's first two volumes and he commented upon them as follows:

Tutto è libero, è originale, è strano in Shakespeare, tutto è regolare, esatto e preciso nella lingua francese: i vocaboli nuovi e le parole ardite fanno sospirare l'Accademia delle Iscrizioni; e siccome non vi è esempio di scrittore che abbia rotte queste catene, il primo che lo ardisse parrebbe un mostro. Per conseguenza vi è dello stento e anche della debolezza nella traduzione, ma è quanto mai si poteva fare. Pretendo che in italiano si esprime molto meglio il senso originale e si mantenga il colorito.

(...) Trovo (...) che la lingua francese si presta infelicamente a quelle espressioni perché lo stile dell'originale è il vero opposto della sintassi e della riservatezza francese; sarebbe come dipingere una cupola coi pennelli di miniatura.

However, he acknowledged Letourneur's ability and success, partly to be attributed in his opinion to the facilities available in Paris, which he badly lacked in Rome:

La traduzione è fatta da persone molto intelligenti della lingua e mi pare perfetta al possibile. A Parigi vi sono in questo genere dei soccorsi che mancano in Roma, perchè vi sono sempre in quella capitale diecimila inglesi e si può conferire ora con un letterato ora con un altro sulle difficoltà del testo. (Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 17 settembre 1777", *ibidem*, p.127).

of eliminating tout court what he does not understand. He generally uses a particularly concise and straightforward language which at times has a quite modern ring and almost seems contemporary twentieth century Italian. On the whole, the general impression seems to be that of a strongly target-oriented translation reached after a conscientious study of the original, in which nothing is simply discarded, and what is doubtful is carefully weighed and evaluated before eventually deciding to omit it.

(a)

The narrative piece is taken from Act I, scene 1.1.73, when Bernardo and Marcellus sit down to hear Horatio's description of King Hamlet's single combat with Fortinbras. It is a formal expository speech signalled in advance to the audience through Marcellus' request of information about the reason of the strict night watch to be kept by the guards. Horatio answers indirectly at first going back to the source of contemporary events: the single combat between King Hamlet and King Fortinbras. It is an elegiac image of an idealized chivalric past, dead and buried just like the two noble kings. The dangerous present situation requiring a military deployment of forces is due to the threatened invasion by the new Fortinbras, who is as brutal and lawless as he is bold. He has repudiated the chivalric compact regulating the two kings' duel and does not accept his father's defeat with consequent loss of territories. This scene is a typical example of what Terence Hawkes finds a fundamental mode in *Hamlet*, a force seeking "to roll the play backwards" in a re-vision or re-interpretation of events "out of their time sequence" making it as it were, move only unwillingly and haltingly forward at the same time looking over its own shoulder, in view of which he proposes to name the play "Telmah: Hamlet backwards". Horatio's retelling of past events, according to this view, is a slow-motion 'action replay' which serves as a preface to the Ghost's second appearance, leads to the story of young Fortinbras and by backward-looking implication brings in Hamlet.³⁹

³⁹Cfr. T. Hawkes, *op.cit.* pp.313-315.

Marcellus:

Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows
Why this same strict and most observant watch
So nightly toils the subject of the land,
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
And foreign mart for implements of war,
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week,
What might be toward that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day,
Who is't that can inform me?

Horatio:

That can I.

At least the whisper goes so; our last King

V.1 Atto Primo-Scena I - pp.3-4

Marcello: or bene sedi; e dimmi, se lo sai; perché questa esatta e vigilante guardia così di notte affanna il paese, e di giorno tanto apparecchio di cannoni e di ogni attrezzo di guerra? A che fine tanti falegnami di vascello che tanto lavorano che non dividono la Domenica dalla settimana? Che può esser mai perché con sudata fretta si lavori giorno e notte? Che è colui che me ne possa informare?

Orazio: Io: almeno di quello che si bisbiglia. Il nostro defunto Re la

V.3 - Atto Primo - Scena III - p.6-8

Marcello

Or bene, sedi e dimmela se la sai. Perché di notte questa così esatta e vigilante guardia affanna il paese? perché di giorno tanto apparecchio di cannoni e di ogni attrezzo di guerra? A che fine tanti costruttori di Vascelli che lavorano perfino la Domenica? perché con tale fretta si sudano a giorno e notte? Chi è colui che me ne possa informare?

Orazio

Io. Almeno di ciò che si bisbiglia. Il nostro Re defunto la

Whose image even but now appear'd to us,
 Was as you know by Fortinbras of Norway,
 Thereto prick'd on by a most emulate pride,
 Dar'd to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet.
 (For so this side of our known world esteem'd him)
 Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a seal'd compact
 Well ratified by law and heraldry
 Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
 Which he stood seiz'd of to the conqueror;

di cui immagine mai ci è apparsa fuorché adesso, fu, come sapete, sfidato a Battaglia da Fortinbrasso di Norveggia stimolato a combattere da una emulante alterigia; in essa il nostro prode Hamelet (che tal nome gli accorda tutto il mondo conosciuto) amazzò questo Fortinbrasso il quale per sigillato patto Conratificato dalle leggi e dal diritto di guerra, perdette con la vita tutto quel suo paese, che aveva usurpato al conquistatore

di cui immagine mai è apparsa fuorché adesso fu, come sapete, sfidato a Battaglia da Fortinbras Principe di Norvegia. Stimolato a combattere da una emulante alterigia. In essa il nostro prode Hamlet, che tale titolo gli accorda tutto il mondo conosciuto, ammazza questo Fortinbras il quale perdette colla vita tutto quel paese che aveva usurpato.

Against the which a moiety competent
 Was gaged by our King, which had return'd
 To the inheritance of Fortinbras,
 Had he been vanquisher; as, by the same cov'nant
 And carriage of the article design'd
 His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
 Of unimproved mettle, hot and full,
 Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
 Shark'd up list of lawless resolute.

ø contro dal quale una metà competente era scommessa o scandagliata per il nostro Re la quale sarebbe ritornata alla eredità di Fortinbrasso se fosse stato vincitore, come per quella convenzione e per quegli articoli à toccata ad Hamlet⁴⁰. Ora il giovine Fortinbrasso d'inesperto ardimento caldo e pieno, ha nelle frontiere della Norvegia e quinci e quindi raccolta una truppa di banditi risoluti dandogli

øThe symbol ø indicates the lines to be omitted in V2 and V3.

Ora il giovine di⁴⁰

*lui successore Fortinbras parimenti chiamato, caldo,
 e pieno d'inesperto ardore, ha raccolta nelle frontiere
 della Norvegia una truppa di risoluti banditi, dando*

⁴⁰As already mentioned, for clarity's sake Verri often expands the Italian text; in this case, while he keeps strictly to the English text in V1, translating "young Fortinbras" with "il giovine Fortinbrasso", in V3 he expands it into "Il giovine di lui successore Fortinbras parimenti chiamato" also leaving the proper name in its English form.

For food and diet to some enterprise
That hath a stomach in't, which is no other,
As it doth well appear unto our state,
But to recover of us by strong hand
And terms compulsory those foresaid lands
So by his father lost. And this, I take it,
Is the main motive of our preparations,
The source of this our watch, and the chief head
Of this post-haste and rummage in the land.

Vitto e vestire per qualche impresa che medita, la quale altra non è come ben apparisce al nostro stato se non se di recuperare da noi per forza quei paesi che suo Padre ha perduti: e questo, io penso, è il principale motivo dei nostri preparativi la cagione della nostra guardia, e della fretta e bisbiglio di cui è pieno il paese.

*loro vitto, e vestire, per qualche impresa che
medita, la quale altra non può essere se non se di
recuperare i paesi da suo padre perduti. E questo io
penso è il principale motivo de' nostri preparativi, la
cagione della nostra guardia e del tumulto e susurro
di cui è pieno il paese.*

Bernardo:
I think it be no other but e'en so.
Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armed through our watch so like the King
That was and is the question of these wars.
Horatio:
A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.
In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,

Bernardo:
io credo che la cosa sia appunto così. Bene ciò assortisce che questa
portentosa figura venga alla nostra guardia colle sembianze del re; ch'era ed è
la cagion di quelle guerre.
Orazio:
alquanto mi si turba la mente. Nel più alto e glorioso Stato di Roma, un poco
avanti che cadesse il potentissimo Giulio Cesare

Bernardo.
Io credo che la cosa sia così. Bene ciò corrisponde alla
apparizione di questa portentosa figura colla sem-
bianza del Re che era, ed è la cagione di guerra.
Orazio
Alquanto mi si turba la mente. Nel più alto e glorioso
stato di Roma un poco prima che il potentissimo Giulio cadesse,

The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
 Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;
 As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
 Disasters in the sun; and the moist star,
 Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands,
 Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.
 And even the like precursor of fear'd events,
 As harbingers preceding still the fates
 And prologue to the omen coming on,
 Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
 Unto our climatures and countrymen.

da sepolcri escirono le ombre, la morte nel suo sudario (lenzuolo) avvolta
 strillò per le vie di Roma, striscie di fuoco apparvero nel cielo e cade rugiada di
 sangue: di disastri diede segno il Sole: e l'umido pianeta sotto la di cui
 influenza sta l'impero di Nettunno mostrò quasi il giorno del final giudizio con
 un eclisse. ed anco collo stesso precorso di fieri eventi come foriera
 precedenza vengono i fati, e come prologo di future vicende, il cielo e la terra
 dimostrato al nostro paese grandi sciagure.

*escirono le ombre dai sepolcri, la morte nello squallido
 Sudario avvolta strillò per le vie di Roma; striscie di
 fuoco apparvero nel cielo, e cade rugiada di sangue;
 il Sole diede segno di disastri, e l'umido pianeta sotto la
 di cui influenza sta l'impero di Nettunno mostrò quasi
 il giorno del finale giudizio con un eclisse; ed anco
 collo stesso precorso di fieri eventi quasi forieri che
 sempre i fati precedono, il cielo, e la terra hanno
 già minacciato al nostro paese grandi sciagure =*

This narrative passage is translated by Verri with evident ease: he seems to be quite at home in reproducing the eloquent rhythm of the narration. On the contrary, he probably felt he could not cope in a satisfactory way with the complicated account of the

compact between King Hamlet and King Fortinbras.⁴¹ He therefore cut it out of the final version although, as we can see from the first version, he could deal with the legal terminology quite adequately, being a lawyer himself.

As a result of this omission, the text is impoverished and does not show the vivid contrast between King Hamlet's legally unobjectionable acquisition of the new lands and young Fortinbras's lawless attempt at recovering them. This particular contrast is important, moreover, being part of the more comprehensive contrast between the noble chivalric world of the past and the violent illegal world of the present, which therefore comes out a little blurred in the Italian translation.

The account of the weird atmosphere created by the prodigies preceding Caesar's murder is a perfect illustration of the way in which Hamlet suited Verri's pre-Romantic inclinations for darkness, sensational horror and death imagery. In addition, Verri was keenly interested in ancient Roman history, so that many elements combined in enabling him to translate these lines very effectively.

An example of a creative transposition of this passage can be found in the parricide episode in Verri's novel Notti Romane⁴² which was to become very famous and an almost obligatory quotation in Verri criticism. The arrival of the parricide was beckoned in the novel by unusual frightening phenomena as follows:

Come la calma del pelago si muta in repentina procella, così ondeggiavano perturbate le ombre per gli avelli, per le ossa, per gli umidi sentieri. Fremea l'aere per confusi e dolenti sospiri, d'infiniti formandone un solo tristissimo.

⁴¹There is in fact a small note pinned on the sheet of the first version, reading as follows: "I patti del combattimento erano che se perdeva Fortinbrasso perdesse il paese che aveva usurpato e se vinceva lo ritenesse. Così rilevo dalla traduzione francese, ma il testo è oscuro." He evidently did not trust La Place at all, and preferred not to run any risk.

⁴²This novel, written during the decade 1780-1790, was published on successive dates: the first part published in 1792 under the title "Al sepolcro degli Scipioni", contained conversations of the author with ghosts of ancient Roman illustrious characters inside the tomb of the noble Scipio family, just discovered by the archeologists; the second part, Sulla Ruina della magnificenza antica, published in 1804, contained dialogues on problems of contemporary Roman history between the author and ghosts, whom he accompanied in a visit around modern Rome. The third part, Le Veglie contemplative was only published in 1967 for the first time; it contained discussions on the main political events in world history after the fall of the Roman Empire. Its main object was the demythologisation of the Enlightenment conception of ancient Rome as a symbol of lay freedom, and the exaltation of the conservative papal government of contemporary Rome, along with the Christian values of unworldly resignation and political non-commitment. By then the involutive trend of Verri's political outlook had come full circle and the memory of his pugnacious young years was completely lost.

Veniva dalla estrema cavità degli antri uno spettro, il quale pareva allargando le braccia implorare la comune pietá (...). Si scosse anco la terra, tremarono le tombe, scrosciarono in suono secco le ossa dentro quelle, e rombava un vento foriero di qualche prodigio imminente.

(A. Verri, Le Notti Romane, op.cit., Colloquio sesto "Il parricida", p.131.)

(b)

The next example is Hamlet's first monologue in act 1⁴³; this meditation on suicide (preparing the way from a structural point of view to the "To be" monologue and expressing the still medieval system of values of Hamlet's worldview: the obstacle to suicide is God's law) may be seen as signalling a manic-depressive syndrome.⁴⁴ Suicide is contemplated as an existential liberation from a present which is all degradation while only the past is heroic and noble. This thought introduces what may be considered the main thrust of the monologue: the vivid contrast drawn by Hamlet between his father and Claudius and his outrage at Gertrude's inability to perceive the differences between the two. This is again "an image of a great falling-off from a heroic, specifically, a godlike past"⁴⁵ and at the same time it expresses Hamlet's personal feeling of weakness and inadequacy. The ironic contrast between himself and Hercules, the doer of great deeds, implies opposing himself to the father he hopes to emulate.

The monologue has a structural internal motivation as it acts as a trait-d'union between the presentation of Claudius, the present king, as an efficient authoritative head of state in the preceding scene and the presentation of the dead King which is to be completed in the following scenes. On the other hand the monologue has an external motivation (on the play-audience axis) in the introduction of Hamlet as a character seen from the inside for the first time. It seemed interesting to compare it with Voltaire's typical desultory treatment of Shakespeare's text.

⁴³Cfr. Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society*, Verso Edition, London, 1984, pp.40-50, who distinguishes various types of monologue/soliloquy (described as a "self-discoursing practice") as follows:

A. DIRECT (i Presentational; ii Expository; iii Indicative or Homiletic)

B. SEMI-DIRECT (i Aside; ii Secretive/Explanatory; iii Characteristic)

C. INDIRECT (i Rhetorical; ii Reflexive; iii Generic)

This particular monologue is classified as "Indirect reflexive" by Williams as the necessary conditions of having an actor alone on the stage and speaking in the first person are fulfilled. However, he also traces in it elements of the "Semi-indirect-Secretive/Explanatory type, which he considers a relatively complex development of the aside, implying a conscious relation to an audience but without the marks of direct address.

⁴⁴Cfr. W. Shakespeare, *Amleto*, N. D'Agostino ed., Milano, Garzanti 1984, p.268, note 13.

⁴⁵Cfr. M. Rose, *op.cit.*, p.100.

Shakespeare⁴⁶

O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

Verri⁴⁷

Ahi troppo solida mia carne, perchè non ti squagli, non ti sghiacci, non ti
sciogli in ruggiada! Oh qual legge l'eterno Iddio ha imposta contro il suicidio!
Dio! oh Dio! quanto fastidiosa, quanto stantiva, insipida, ed inutili mi sembrano
le cose di questo mondo.

Voltaire⁴⁸

Oh! si ma chair trop ferme ici pouvait se fondre,
Se dégeler, couler, se résoudre en rosée!
Oh! si l'Etre éternel n'avait pas du canon
Contre le suicide!... ô ciel! ô ciel! ô ciel!
Que tout ce que je vois aujourd'hui dans le monde
Est triste, plat, pourri, sans nulle utilité!

⁴⁶Hamlet. I.ii. 129-159, pp.187-190.

⁴⁷V3, *Atto Primo-Scena VI*-p.14-15 (my own numbering).

⁴⁸This translation is contained in an article by Voltaire in La Gazette Littéraire de l'Europe, 4th april 1764
contained in Voltaire, op.cit., Vol. 25 *Mélanges*, pp.160-161

Neither Verri nor Voltaire, owing to the nature of their respective languages could possibly preserve the peculiar sound effects of the first two lines of the original, where the long sounds (the twice-repeated oo sound) are placed in a central position in the first line and are distributed in the first and last position in the second line. As a result of this pattern the two lines are made more compact and cohesive in their expression of an existential disgust for human physicality. Voltaire's verse translation uses alliteration in the repetition of the 'f' sound (*ferme, fondre*) in the first line and of the 'r' and 'z' sounds (*résoudre; rosée*) in the second, but perhaps the two lines are more effectively linked up together through the rather symmetrical repetition of the 's' sounds (*si...ici...se...se...se...*). Verri is perhaps more successful in his fluent poetic prose with his use of 's' in 'solida' reiterated in 'squagli' and 'sghiacci'; moreover, 'solida'⁴⁹ creates an additional layer of meaning, as its hardness is vividly contrasted with the progression of the different degrees of liquidity which follow.

In Voltaire the same succession of melting images is respected, with the addition of a supplementary one: "couler".

There is an important difference in tone between the three texts. While both Shakespeare and Voltaire start out with a solemn universalized invocation pervaded with a poignant desire for self-annihilation, Verri's use of the second person singular is extraordinarily direct and personalized. He creates an effect of intimate effusion of feelings in this lively psychological search for self; instead of a monologue the speech becomes a dialogue between Hamlet and his own body, a twist in tone which can only be attributed, in my opinion, to Verri's pre-Romantic inclination. He seems to anticipate here the typical self-questioning of the tormented Romantic spirit in the use of a "perché" construction which, however, is followed not by a question, but by an exclamation mark.⁵⁰

⁴⁹The reading "solid flesh" was probably the most usual one in the 18th century, and in fact it is the one adopted by Verri, even if discussions had already started about the adoption of "sullied", which, after a long critical debate was to be definitively brought into favour by Dover Wilson.

⁵⁰In this connection here is a diagram showing the number of exclamation marks used by each author in the whole passage:

SH - 6 (in H. Jenkins' edition there are 4)

VE - 19 (some cuts in the final version)

VO - 18 (many cuts and transpositions)

The religious reference to God's prohibition of suicide is preserved in both the French and Italian translation; there is a symmetry in Voltaire in the repetition of the optative "si" construction of the opening, while the negative form of the original is preserved, reflecting its particular yearning mood. Verri builds up a different sort of symmetry in the use of an assertive "qual legge", followed by "quanto fastidioso, quanto stantivo, ecc".

Such a huge difference in numbers significantly underlines the difference in nature between the two neo-Latin languages and English, and the common tendency of the former to over-excitement and emphasis (more prominent in French than in Italian in this particular case).

Shakespeare

Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead - nay, not so much, not two
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,

Verri

Oibò, oibò: parmi ingombrato da rancide e selvagge erbe...⁵¹ Chi giunse a tale eccesso! Solo due mesi dopo la sua morte...no, non tanto, nemmeno due... Un Re così eccellente, al par di cui questo è come un Satiro accanto un Iperione, così amante di mia madre che non permetteva che la di lei faccia fosse lambita da vento alquanto austero. Oh cielo, oh terra!

Voltaire

Fi! fi! c'est un jardin plein de plantes sauvages!
Après un mois ma mère épouser mon propre oncle!
Mon père, un si bon roi!...L'autre, en comparaison,
N'était rien qu'un satyre, et mon père un soleil.
Mon père, il m'en souvient, aimait si fort ma mère,
Qu'il ne souffrait jamais qu'un vent sur son visage
Soufflât trop rudement. O terre! ô juste ciel!

The opening interjection "Fie on't, ah fie" is very easily translated into French by Voltaire with the almost identical "Fi! fi!", which however is reinforced by the exclamation marks, while evidently the English "fie" does not need this reinforcement. Verri uses "oibò, oibò" which rings rather ludicrous to our twentieth century ears, but was probably not perceived as such in the eighteenth century. Both Verri and Voltaire shorten the important metaphor of the unweeded garden, part of the recurrent garden imagery in Hamlet where the model of the first happy and well-tended garden of Eden is no longer followed. This garden is being invaded by rank and vigorous weeds, representing sin in popular Renaissance iconography. Since the garden imagery is an important component of the contrast between the noble world of the past and the corrupted world of the present,⁵² its symbolic impact comes out weakened in both translations.

⁵¹ Compare this shortened version with the complete translation of V1, which also includes two of Verri's typical explanatory notes in brackets: "Oibò, oibò: egli è un non sarchiato (cioè ove non sono tagliate col sarchio l'erbe selvatiche) giardino che cresce a semenza/cioè le sue erba fanno il ballo ossia la SEMENZA/ c pieno di rancide e rozze erbacce."

⁵² This contrast is powerfully exemplified in the two brother kings, one as a god of the sun in human form (in Voltaire's translation: "un soleil", which is perhaps less impressive than the mythological proper name preserved from the original by Verri), and the other as a creature half man half beast.

Voltaire, using a sort of journalistic short cut goes straight to the heart of the matter and places right at the beginning the crucial fact of the incestuous marriage, which in Shakespeare comes as a very effective climax only at the end of a long, involved speech: "married with my uncle". Verri follows Shakespeare's syntactic order more closely than Voltaire. However, unlike Voltaire, he does not preserve the active form referred to the winds visiting "her face too roughly". In this way "la di lei faccia" becomes the subject of a passive verb "fosse lambita", acquiring a more central role in the speech.

Shakespeare

Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on; and yet within a month -
Let me not think on't. - Frailty, thy name is woman -
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears - why, she -
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourn'd longer - married with my uncle,
My father's brother - but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married - O most wicked speed! To post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

Verri

oh fragilità!⁵³ Nemmeno un mese! prima che fossero logorate quelle scarpe
colle quali seguiva il funerale del mio padre infelice, come Niobe tutta in
lagrime!... Dunque ella, ella stessa...O Cielo, una bestia che non ha senso di
ragione avrebbe pianto più lungamente! Maritarsi con mio Zio, col fratello di
mio Padre? ma non più simile a mio Padre di quello che lo sono io ad Ercole.
In un mese! Prima che il salso delle iniquissime lagrime avesse fatte arrossire
le sue ippocrite luci! oh tristissima fretta di stendere gl'incestuosi lenzuoli!
Questo non può finir bene. Ma scoppia mio cuore: bisogna ch'io freni la mia
lingua.

Voltaire

Faut-il me souvenir qu'elle le caressait
Comme si l'appétit s'augmentait en mangeant!
Un mois! *fragilité!* ton nom propre est *la femme*,
Un mois, un petit mois! avant d'avoir usé
Les souliers qu'elle avait à son enterrement!

Voltaire ends his translation of the monologue quite abruptly after the mention of the Queen's shoes, one of the lines which he used as an excuse for attacking *Hamlet* as a vulgar and indecent play. Verri goes on translating till the end in the most scrupulous way, except for his omission of the final "she married" which concludes the long speech, just before the indignant exclamation "o most wicked speed" and the two despondent last lines.

⁵³ Verri's omission of three and a half lines including the forceful portrayal of the Queen as a passionately sensual lover and the over-famous apostrophe against women, is difficult to comprehend. The more so as Verri did not find any particular difficulty in the translation, as can be seen from the first draft: "Dovrò io rammentare? ... ch'ella s'appiccherebbe a lui come se l'accrescimento della sensualità fosse aumentato da quella di cui è nutrita... Fragilità il tuo nome è femina."

(c)

The third example is taken from two passages, one from Act I and the other from Act III. In the former Hamlet, immediately after uttering the "sullied flesh" monologue, meets for the first time Horatio who has come back from Wittenberg and welcomes him with warm friendliness. Horatio informs Hamlet of the appearance of his father's ghost during the night watch and Hamlet, very troubled, makes secret arrangements for meeting him with Marcellus and Barnardo at the next night watch, in the hope of seeing the ghost and talking to him. In the latter passage another dialogue takes place between Hamlet and Horatio alone, in which perhaps the most laudatory speech in the whole play is uttered by Hamlet in praise of Horatio as the paragon of the just non-heroic man. Hamlet feels that he can safely share with Horatio his secret intention of finding out the truth about his father's murder, and makes known to him his king-catching design behind the play-within-the-play.

These two passages have been selected for the special role they play in the Hamlet/Horatio relationship⁵⁴ marking the development from friendship towards close intimacy, signalled by the pronoun shift to "thou".⁵⁵ Throughout the first passage "you" is used by Hamlet, whereas the second passage starts with Hamlet addressing Horatio in the second person "thou" (and he will go on using it from now on, except for the strange short interlude of 26 lines starting with "So much for this, sir; Now shall you see the other." (V.ii.1) when Hamlet tells Horatio of his adventures at sea, while going to England, but before recounting the details of the story he suddenly reverts to "thou": "But wilt thou hear now how I did proceed?" (V.ii.27). Verri certainly could not be aware of what was implied in the pronoun shift in Shakespeare's language, but with his typical

⁵⁴This viewpoint is developed according to the analysis carried out by A.K. Kennedy, *Dramatic Dialogue: the duologue of personal encounter*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp.66-75, where the intimate personal encounter is called "duologue". Within different types of dialogue (cfr. the useful categorization made by Raymond Williams, *op.cit.*, pp.31-39 of three types of dialogue: Formal Exchange, Enclosed Person-to-Person, Informal Exchange) the "duologue" is perhaps the most flexible and effective structure of all in achieving what seems to be the most characteristic function of dramatic dialogue: to act as an agent of transformation.

⁵⁵For the problem of the You/Thou alternation in Shakespeare, cfr. my essay "The Hidden Text: Problems of Translation in *As You Like It*", *art cit.*, *supra*, p.122.

scrupulous honesty he stuck exactly to the same pronouns used in the original (except for the first cue in which Horatio uses "you" and Verri's Orazio uses "tu").

<u>Hamlet</u> . I, ii, 159-258; pp.190-196		<u>1st passage</u>	V3, Atto Primo, Scena VII, pp. 15-20 (my own numbering)
Horatio	Hail to your lordship	Orazio	Dio ti salvi o Principe
Hamlet	I am glad to see you well. Horatio, or I do forget myself.	Hamlet	Ho gran piacere di riveder- vi, Orazio?...oppure m'inganno?
Horatio	The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.	Orazio	Si mio Principe io son quel- lo, quel debole vostro servitore
Hamlet	Sir, my good friend, I'll change that name with you. And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?- Marcellus	Hamlet	Mio buon amico; voglio che così cambiate quel titolo. E che fate fuori di Wittenberg? ...Oh Marcello!

The tone of confidentiality is established very rapidly by Hamlet's extremely friendly welcome to Horatio who, on the other hand, never changes his respectful attitude as an inferior towards his superior (also shown in his unbroken use of the "you" pronoun).⁵⁶ Verri eliminates the initial "Sir" in the last cue which seems to add to the impulsiveness and friendliness of Hamlet's words.

Marcellus	My good lord	Marcello	Mio buon Signore...
Hamlet	I am very glad to see you [To Barnardo] Good even sir. - But what in faith make you /from Wittenberg?	Hamlet	Vi avvenga sempre ogni bene.
		57

⁵⁶In this connection cfr. A.K. Kennedy op.cit., p.69, where he writes that in Horatio Shakespeare "fused the traditional role of the confidant" with that of the spokesman, who is given "lines of great beauty and chorus-like universality."

⁵⁷The lines omitted in V3 were translated as follows in V1: "Hamlet: Ma che fate in verità fuori di Wittenberg? Orazio: vagabondi buon signor nostro. Hamlet: Io non ascolterò un vostro nemico dir tal cosa. Né voi farete alle mie orecchie questa violenza di far loro credere un vostro rapporto contro voi stessi? Io so che non siete vagabondi. Ma quai sono i vostri affari in Elsinor? Io vi voglio insegnare a aver zeppo (hoir rasade si direbbe in francese) prima che partiate." Horatio's words here were meant only for himself, but Verri takes them as referring also to Marcellus and Barnardo as he forgets that they are soldiers and not fellow students.

Horatio	A truant disposition, good my /lord.	
Hamlet	I would not hear your enemy /say so,	
	Nor shall you do my ear that /violence	
	To make it truster of your own /report	
	Against yourself. I know you /are no truant
	But what is your affair in /Elsinore?		Ma quai sono i vostri affari Elsinore?
	We'll teach you to drink deep /ere you depart!		
Horatio	My lord, I came to see your /father's funeral.	Marcello	Vengo a vedere il funerale di vostro Padre.
Hamlet	I prithee do not mock me, /fellow-student.	Hamlet	Di grazia, non ti burlare di me, mio compagno di scuola.
	I think it was to see my mother's /wedding.		Io credo che tu venghi alle nozze di mia Madre.
Horatio	Indeed my lord, it follow'd hard /upon.	Orazio	Invero ella vi è corsa presto.
Hamlet	Thrift, thrift, Horatio. The /funeral bak'd meats. Did coldly furnish forth the /marriage tables. Would I had met my dearest foe /in heaven. Or ever I had seen that day, /Horatio. My father - methinks I see /my father -	Hamlet	Economia, economia! Le pasticcerie del funerale fornirono a rifreddo le mense nuziali. Avessi mai veduto quel giorno! Mio Padre... Mi pare di vederlo.
Horatio	Where, my lord?	Orazio	Dove mio Principe?
Hamlet	In my mind's eye, Horatio.	Hamlet	Cogli occhi della mente, Orazio.

After a digression on the memory of Hamlet's dead father, Horatio gives Hamlet his eye-witness account of the ghost's appearance:

<p>Horatio Two nights together had these /gentlemen, Marcellus and Bernardo, on their /watch In the dead waste and middle of /the night Been thus encounter'd: a figure /like your father Armed at point exactly, cap-à-pie, Appears before them, and with /solemn march</p> <p>Goes slow and stately by them; /thrice he walk'd By their oppress'd and fear- /surprised eyes Within his truncheon's length, /whilst they, distill'd Almost to jelly with the act of fear, Stand dumb and speak not to him. /This to me In dreadful secrecy impart they did, And I with them the third night kept /the watch, Where, as they had deliver'd, both /in time, Form of the thing, each word made /true and good, The apparition comes. I knew your /father, These hands are not more like.</p>	<p>Orazio Già da due notti Marcello e Bernardo essendo in guardia hanno insieme veduta una figura simile a vostro Padre armata esattamente di tutto punto da capo a piè. Era il suo diporto magnifico, il suo passeggio lento, e ben tre volte si accostò ai loro occhi oppressi e intimoriti così vicini quanto la lunghezza del suo scettro. Gelati di timore, muti rimasero. Comunica- tomi da loro questo spaventevole segreto feci in terzo la guardia con essi la notte seguente. Ed appena ebber fatta la consegna e dato il santo secondo l'usanza, venne l'apparizione. Io conobbi vostro Padre, queste mani non si somigliano tanto.</p>
---	---

This impressive descriptive piece is translated by Verri skilfully in a successful reproduction of its solemn tone and slow rhythms. There is no prolixity but some misunderstandings or omissions: in "intimoriti" the surprise element is missed; "gelati di timore" for "distilled/almost to jelly with the act of fear" seems a deliberate choice on Verri's part, as he probably thought "gelatina" was not a noble enough word in such a solemn and frightening context (or could even have a ludicrous ring as D'Agostino⁵⁸ observes in a footnote to his own beautiful translation). However, it is to be noted that both words start with "gel" thus creating an effective similarity in sound. Two whole lines from "Where" to "good" are completely misunderstood.

⁵⁸Cfr. N. D'Agostino, *op.cit.*, p.270.

Hamlet	But where was this?	Hamlet	Ma dove ciò avvenne?
Marcellus	My lord, upon the platform where /we watch.	Marcello	Nell'atrio dove eravamo in /guardia.
Hamlet	Did you not speak to it?	Hamlet	Non gli parlaste?
Horatio	My lord, I did, But answer made it none. Yet /once methought It lifted up it head and did address Itself to motion like as it would /speak. But even then the morning cock /crew loud And at the sound it shrunk in /haste away And vanish'd from our sight.	Orazio	Sì, ma non rispose. Pure mi parve che una volta alzasse la testa, e si ponesse in attitudine di parlare; ma allora appunto il mattutino gallo strillò, ed a quel canto disparve.
Hamlet	'Tis very strange.	Hamlet	Strana cosa!
Horatio	As I do live, my honour'd lord, /tis true; And we did think it writ down in /our duty. To let you know of it.	Orazio	E' vero quant'è vero ch'io vivo, e lo potremmo anche mettere in iscritto.
Hamlet	Indeed, sirs; but this troubles me. Hold you the watch tonight?	Hamlet	Lo credo, lo credo, ma questo mi turba. Fate voi la guardia questa notte?
All	We do, my lord.	Entrambi	Sì Principe
Hamlet	Arm'd, say you?	Hamlet	Armato?
All	Arm'd, my lord.	Entrambi	Armato o Principe
Hamlet	From top to toe?	Hamlet	Da capo a piè?
All	My lord, from head to foot.	Entrambi	Da capo a piè.
Hamlet	Then saw you not his face?	Hamlet	Non gli vedeste dunque la /faccia?
Horatio	O yes, my lord, he wore his /beaver up.	Orazio	Sì, egli aveva alzata la vi- /siera
Hamlet	What look'd he, frowningly?	Hamlet	Guardava egli biecamente?
Horatio	A countenance more in sorrow /than in anger	Orazio	Piuttosto in aria mesta che /irata
Hamlet	Pale, or red?	Hamlet	Era pallido o rosso?
Horatio	Nay, very pale.	Orazio	Pallidissimo.
Hamlet	And fix'd his eyes upon you?	Hamlet	E fissò gli occhi su di voi?
Horatio	Most constantly.	Orazio	Molto fermamente.
Hamlet	I would I had been there.	Hamlet	Vorrei essermivi trovato.
Horatio	It would have much amaz'd you.	Orazio	Vi avrebbe fatto gran /stupore.
Hamlet	Very like. Stay'd it long?	Hamlet	E' molto verisimile. Si trattenne egli lungamente?
Horatio	While one with moderate haste /might tell a hundred.	Orazio	Quanto tempo vi vuole a contar cento senza gran fretta.
Marcellus	Longer, longer.	Entrambi	Più, più.
Barnardo	Not when I saw't.	Orazio	Non quando lo vidd'io.
Horatio	His beard was grizzled, no?	Hamlet	Aveva orrida la barba?
Hamlet	It was as I have seen it in his life, /A sable silver'd.	Orazio	Era come gliel'ho veduta in vita, un bruno inargentato.
Hamlet	I will watch tonight. Perchance 'twill walk again.	Hamlet	Voglio vegliare questa notte, forse apparirà di nuovo.
Horatio	I war'nt it will.	Orazio	Ve ne rispondo, egli apparirà.

Hamlet's intense cross-examination of Horatio is so transparent and direct that it might easily be dismissed as an insignificant theatrical and stylistic structure both when performed and when read. But it is not, as Kennedy very perceptively explains:⁵⁹

...in the context of the play it establishes a unique kind of dialogue. It is first of all, not merely expository in the rudimentary sense of using Horatio to provide necessary information about the Ghost to the audience. Rather, the dialogue enacts a process of exploration and discovery, of urgent truth seeking within an undistorted communicative framework, precise question-and-answer. Although this dialogue is not intimately personal, only intimate trust makes it possible.

Verri's translation is perfect in this kind of quick repartee dialogue (vastly different as Kennedy points out,⁶⁰ from the apparently similarly structured verbal games Hamlet plays with Polonius, or from the "crude symmetry of a mocking stichomythia" of Hamlet's encounter with his mother: "Queen: Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue/ Hamlet: Go, go, you answer with a wicked tongue" which of course are far removed from the great dramatic pathos permeating Hamlet's enquiry here), as its simple everyday colloquial language successfully reproduces the intensity of the original: Verri's down-to-earth prose suits perfectly, as to vocabulary and rhythm, Shakespeare's short irregular lines, almost bordering on plain prose. The episode closes with Hamlet's recommendations for secrecy about the Ghost and about their meeting at the next night watch.

Second Passage

Hamlet, III, ii, 52-91, pp.290-293

Hamlet	What ho, Horatio!
Horatio	Here, sweet lord, at your service.
Hamlet	Horatio, thou art e'en as just a /man As e'er my conversation cop'd /withal.
Horatio	O my dear lord.
Hamlet	Nay, do not think I flatter, For what advancement may I hope /from thee That no revenue hast but thy good /spirits

V3, Atto Terzo, Scena VII, pp.59-60

Hamlet	Ohi Orazio!
Orazio	Mio buon Signore al vostro /comando
Hamlet	Orazio tu sei ancora un /uomo giusto
Orazio	Oh mio Principe...
Hamlet:	No: non credere che ti aduli, giacchè qual vantaggio poss'io sperare da te che non hai altre entrate che le tue buone

⁵⁹Cfr. A. K. Kennedy, op.cit., p.70.

⁶⁰Cfr. ibidem, pp.70-71.

To feed and clothe thee? Why
 should the poor be flatter'd?
 No, let the candied tongue lick
 /absurd pomp,
 And crook the pregnant hinges of
 /the knee
 Where thrift may follow fawning.
 /Dost thou hear?
 Since my dear soul was mistress
 /of her choice,
 And could of men distinguish her
 /election,
 Sh'ath seal'd thee for herself; for
 /thou hast been
 As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers
 /nothing,
 A man that Fortune's buffets and
 /rewards
 Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and
 /blest are those
 Whose blood and judgement are so
 /well commeddled
 That they are not a pipe for Fortune's
 /finger
 to sound what stop she please. Give
 /me that man
 That is not passion's slave and I will
 /wear him
 In my heart's core, ay, in my heart
 /of heart,
 As I do thee. Something too much of
 /this.
 There is a play tonight before the King:
 One scene of it comes near the circum-
 /stance
 Which I have told thee of my father's
 /death.
 I prithee, when thou seest that act
 /afoot,
 Even with the very comment of thy
 /soul
 Observe my uncle. If his occulted
 /guilt
 Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
 It is a damned ghost that we have
 /seen,
 And my imaginations are as foul
 As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heed-
 /ful note;
 For I mine eyes will rivet to his face
 And after we will both our judg-
 /ments join
 In censure of his seeming.
 Well, my lord
 If a steal aught the whilst this play
 /is playing
 And scape detecting, I will pay the
 /theft.

Horatio

Orazio

qualità? Poichè l'anima
 mia ebbe la facoltà di
 scegliere, e seppe distin-
 guere gli uomini, la sua
 scelta cadde sopra di te;
 perchè fosti sempre un
 uomo che prese egualmente
 gli schiaffi ed i favori della
 fortuna; e beati coloro di tal
 carattere e giudizio che la
 fortuna non può suonarli
 colle sue dita qual
 zampogna nel tuono che le
 piace. Dammi un uomo che
 non sia schiavo delle sue
 passioni, ed io lo porterò
 nel mio cuore, sì, nel mio
 cuore come faccio di te...
 Ma lasciamo questo di-
 scorso. Questa sera si fa
 una tragedia alla presenza
 del Re, una scena della
 quale rassomiglia alle
 circostanze che accompa-
 gnarono la morte di mio
 Padre.
 Io ti prego allora, osserva
 colla maggior attenzione
 mio Zio. Se il suo occulto
 delitto non si palesa a quella
 rappresentanza, è un'ombra
 dannata quella che
 abbiamo veduta. Io non gli
 leverò mai gli occhi dal viso
 e dopo ci abbotcheremo.

Ottimamente, mio Principe

loud voice as if to show that his relationship to Horatio is just that between a prince and his subject. Verri could not of course have an adequate insight into such subtle shades of meaning in the English language and went on using "tu", perhaps thinking that the "you" shift was insignificant. At the beginning of the duologue Verri is absolutely at a loss about how to translate Hamlet's peculiar initial phrase "as just a man/As e'er my conversation coped withal" and eliminates most of it.⁶⁴

In Hamlet's speech "Nay, do not think I flatter", there are some minor changes and omissions in respect of V1 at the beginning⁶⁵ and more important ones in the rest of the speech.⁶⁶

⁶⁴V1 reads as follows: "Hamlet: Orazio tu sei ancora come un uomo giusto come sempre la mia conversazione (coap'd non c'è nel diz^o) con." Of course, the abbreviation is for "dizionario".

⁶⁵V3 omits the following: "(le tue buone qualità) per nutrirti e vestirti? Sarebb'egli adulato un povero?"

⁶⁶V1 reads as follows: "No: lecchi una (candied non c'è nel diz^o) lingua le assurde pompe e pieghi li pregnanti cardini delle ginocchia, ove la fortuna può venir dietro l'adulazione. M'intendi tu? Poichè l'anima mia fu padrona della sua scelta, e seppe distinguere gli uomini, la sua scelta cade sopra di Te. Perchè tu fosti come uno che soffrendo tutto, soffre nulla: un uomo che prese egualmente gli schiaffi come i favori della fortuna, e beati sono quelli il di cui temperamento e giudizio sono così assortiti, ch'essi non sono una zampogna per le dita della fortuna ov'ella suoni in qual tuono le piace."

The following two sentences are not changed in V3, but changes and omissions continue starting from: "Io ti prego quando la vedrai declamare (when thou seest that Act afoot: quest'ultima non v'è nel diz^o) osserva colla maggior censura del tuo spirito il mio Zio. Se il suo occulto delitto non si stana (unkenne) vuol dire far uscire la volpe della tana) a quella parlata, è un'ombra dannata che noi abbiamo veduta, e la mia immaginazione è così imbrattata quanto la fucina di Vulcano.. Fagli attenta osservazione: perchè non gli leverò gli occhi miei dal viso; e dopo uniremo i nostri giudizi per consultazione delle sue sembianze."

As already mentioned, here too Verri sometimes translates rather tricky points quite correctly but then does not have the courage to include them in V2 and V3.

Stage History of Ducis' Italian Translation of Hamlet by Francesco Gritti

Shakespeare's Hamlet was smuggled onto the Italian stage under Ducis' neoclassic camouflage in 1774, in an anonymous Italian translation which was later to be acknowledged by the Venetian patrician Francesco Gritti. It was staged at the S. Giovanni Grisostomo theatre in Venice and ran for nine nights during the Carnival period.

In the preface to the first edition of the play¹, published in Venice in the same year, the translator gives his Italian readers the following information:

L'Amleto di Shakespear è per l'Inghilterra ciò, per esempio, che il *Convitato di Pietra* è tuttavia per l'Italia una cioè delle più mostruose e non di meno una delle più frequentate Rappresentazioni teatrali. Per mettere in istato i Lettori di rendere la dovuta giustizia ai talenti di *Mr. Ducis*, Autore della susseguente Tragedia, composta ad imitazione della Inglese, e della quale presento al Pubblico la Traduzione, non sarà malfatto, cred'io, di mostrar loro la fonte da cui l'ha Egli tratta, onde possano con fondamento decidere, se l'Edifizio Francese ha conservato tutte le bellezze e rettificata punto la costruzione deforme di quell'antico bizzarro modello.

This short introductory note is followed by an "ESTRATTO Dell'*Amleto di Shakespear*" which may probably be considered the earliest really faithful account of Shakespeare's play ever printed in Italy. Apart from a few passages which are amusing to readers today², the story is told in a brief resume (but the details are all exact), in a neutral tone, free from the usual Voltaireian commonplaces of which there are glimpses elsewhere in the preface. After the extract, Gritti gives the following judgement of Hamlet and again mentions Voltaire and his account of the play, but does not comment on Voltaire's attitude to it:

¹ Amleto, tragedia di M. Ducis, op.cit.

² When Hamlet is persuaded by Claudius and Gertrude not to go back to Wittenberg and to stay at Elsinore, "il Re comanda che in segno di giubilo vada ognuno a ubbriacarsi allo sparo di tutta l'Artiglieria, senza ricordarsi, come riflette Mr. de Voltaire, che non era stata inventata ancora la polvere". The dialogue in which Polonius instructs Reynaldo to find out about Laertes' behaviour in Paris by suggesting to his friends that he is misbehaving in some way ("...drinking, fencing, swearing, Quarrelling, drabbing - you may go so far") so that they are led to speak the truth, is misunderstood as follows: "Polonio raccomanda il Figlio al suo Ajo, e gli ordina in termini precisi di tenergli gli occhi addosso, perchè il lussuriosaccio va qualche volta al bordello." The scene in which Hamlet resists the temptation to kill Claudius while he is praying, for fear that he may go to heaven, has an amusing reference to Dante: "Amleto si sente tentato dal desiderio di ucciderlo in quel momento, ma il timore di vederlo volare in Paradiso lo trattiene, e risolve di aspettare di coglierlo in peccato mortale, onde aver la consolazione di precipitarlo in una delle bolge di Dante". At the end of the closet scene, Hamlet's exit is described in the following farcical way: "Amleto finalmente si ritira, ma nell'andarsene inciampa nel cadavere del Ciambellano, e quasi dà del mostaccio per terra".

Termina così la famosa Tragedia di *Amleto*, il Capo d'opera del Teatro di Londra. La strana grottesca varietà di spettacolo ch'ella presenta ha sedotto, e rapisce tuttavia il volgo Inglese: qualche pensiero ingegnoso, alcuni versi naturali e pieni di energia che s'imprimono nella memoria dell'Uditore quasi suo proprio malgrado, e finalmente una rispettosa prevenzione per un'Autor nazionale ed antico hanno guadagnato quasi tutto il resto dell'Inghilterra. *Mr. de Voltaire* diede già di questa Tragedia un più lungo e circostanziato dettaglio; una traduzione fedele di questo sarebbe riescita molto più grata a' Lettori che non lo farà un'estrato ricavatone così alla sfuggita e di volo. (...) Basterà esso per altro (...) a porre in istato chi legge di giudicare con fondamento degli sforzi d'ingegno che *Mr. Ducis* ha dovuto mettere in opera per ridurre a regolare e nobile forma questo, per altro non dispregevole, Scenico Mostro.

Gritti then goes on to illustrate his own personal ideas on theatre translation: he strongly believes in re-elaborating the original text in view of the special needs and expectations of the target audience, and is not at all afraid of making arbitrary changes in order to pursue his end. Such a criterion may well be classified, according to Bassnett's categorization³ as belonging to the "performability strategy": Gritti's approach, wholly based on the performance dimension, appears therefore extraordinarily modern to us:

In quanto alla mia Traduzione, ella sarà debole ma non certamente servile. Io ho creduto a crederò sempre che per tradurre e non tradire⁴ un'Autore Drammatico, sia d'uopo conservare l'intero dell'azione e i caratteri degli Attori, ed arbitrare a talento e nel numero e nell'esposizione de sentimenti, i quali vanno rifusi e vestiti a foggia della Nazione che ne dev'essere spettatrice.

Gritti polemically attacks the pedantry of those critics who oppose his liberal conception of translation, but he also expresses the hope that Ducis may recognize his *Hamlet* despite the changes:

Chi si prenderà dunque la briga di confrontare *l'Amleto* di *Mr. Ducis* con la traduzione che io ne presento al Pubblico, troverà qualche aggiunta, e qualche mutilazione: delitto imperdonabile al Tribunale de' Pedanti. Ma siccome io m'ho il difetto ottico di non vedere in essi che gli Arlecchini del Letterario Teatro, io preferisco gli stimoli che li costringono a palesarsi e fare i loro soliti comici lazzi ad un troppo serio disprezzo che li obblighi celarsi e tacere. Spero per altro che giunta alle mani di *Mr. Ducis*, per i cui rari talenti ho d'accordo con la sua Patria un'ammirazione sincera, la mia forse troppo libera Traduzione non abbia a rendergli inavvisabile la sua meritamente applaudita Tragedia.

³Cfr. Supra., p.121, footnote 6 the already mentioned article "Ways through the Labyrinth".

⁴This might easily be the earliest printed instance of what has become the traditional Italian motto: "traduttore traditore".

Finally, Gritti expresses the hope that the actors of the Italian version of Hamlet will deserve the same praise given by the author to the French protagonist Molé⁵:

Io desidero intanto, che i quattro Attori che ne sosterranno le parti principali sulle nostre Scene, meritino (...) l'elogio fatto dall'Autore medesimo a *Mr. Molé* che superò se stesso nel rappresentarne l'Eroe.

Gritti's conclusion is extremely pessimistic: "la maniera di recitarle (le parti) che non decide del merito, deciderà sempre del destino di tutte le composizioni Teatrali. Ma il disordine del nostro Teatro non permette di predire il destino di questa, ne di qualunque altra rappresentazione" and he ends his preface with a catastrophic picture of contemporary Italian theatre.⁶ An example of what Gritti meant when he explained that he did not hesitate to change Ducis' text is in the crucial scene in which Hamlet shows his mother the urn containing his father's ashes (this scene has been considered as a substitute for Shakespeare's play-within-the-play for its functions of revealing the author of the king's murder). Although the whole scene is translated almost word by word, right at the end, when Hamlet is about to kill his mother because she has betrayed her guilt in the presence of the urn and the Ghost, unseen by the queen, cavernously urges Hamlet to go on with the stabbing, Gritti simply omits the Ghost (in accordance with the prevailing aesthetic principles of the time) and has Hamlet simply threaten his mother that the Ghost will appear and will give him the force to carry out his revenge. In the end, however, in both versions Hamlet spares his mother's life and leaves in a turmoil of contrasting passions:

HAMLET

Ah! je respire enfin. Ma vengeance est certaine.
C'est le ciel sous mes coups qui l'amene aujourd'hui.

GERTRUDE

Que la pitié te touche.

HAMLET

Il n'en est plus pour lui.

GERTRUDE

Mon fils?

HAMLET (Le Spectre reparoît)

⁵Molé, who had started his career as a tragic actor with Ducis' Hamlet and had done most for its success, tried to pattern his acting after the style of the most successful French actor of the period, Lekain but, according to the 19th century critic Hedgecock, he also, perhaps unconsciously, tried to imitate Garrick: "although the English actor would have fled in terror before the demoniacal howls of Molé's Hamlet, yet the Frenchman was in a sense his pupil" (Quoted in M. Monaco, op.cit., p.77).

⁶Cfr. Supra, Part I, pp.29-30, footnote 20, "The Theatre Question".

La voyez-vous cette Ombre menaçante
 Qui vient pour raffermir ma fureur chancelante?
 GERTRUDE
 Où suis-je?
 HAMLET (s'adressant au Spectre)
 Oui, je t'entends; tu vas être obéi.
 (A sa mere)
 Oui, tous deux dans leur sang...Que faites-vous ici!
 GERTRUDE
 Grands Dieux!
 HAMLET
 Savez-vous bien qu'en ce désordre extrême.
 Je puis dans cet instant attenter sur vous-même?
 GERTRUDE *se laissant tomber d'effroi aux pieds d'Hamlet.*
 Ciel!
 HAMLET
 Détournons les yeux
 (*Il tire son poignard.*)
 LE SPECTRE
 Frappe
 HAMLET
 J'entends sa voix
 (*Se tournant pour frapper sa Mere.*)
 C'en est fait. A mes pieds! est-ce vous que j'y vois?
 GERTRUDE, *en se relevant*
 Mon fils;
 HAMLET
 Eh bien ma Mere?...ah! Dieux...mon coeur peut-être,
 D'un transport renaissant ne seroit plus le maître.
 Fuyez, sortez, vous dis-je: ou plutôt je vous fuis:
 Je crains tout de moi-même en l'état où je suis.
 (ACTE IV - Scene VI)
 (Collection de Tragédies, Comédies et Dramas Choisis des plus célèbres auteurs modernes - Tome Premier - Hamlet - Tragédie par Monsieur Ducis - Livourne 1774, Chez Thomas Masi et Compagnie, pp.230-231)

AML.
 Respiro alfine.
 Certa è la mia vendetta. Il Cielo stesso
 L'empio assassino a'colpi miei presenta.
 GEL.
 Deh! la pietà [*in atto di trattenerlo*]...
 AML
 [*con furore*] Per chi mi uccise il padre?...
 Delitto è la pietà. Lasciami.
 GEL. [*supplichevole*]
 Figlio...
 AML
 Ah! trema omai, che l'ombra minacciosa
 Qui non risorga a rinfrancare il mio
 Vacillante furor contro te stessa.
 Esci, fuggi, ti dico... Ah! no, fuggirti
 Degg'io piuttosto...Sì, da me medesimo
 Nello stato in cui son tutto pavento. [*parte*]
 GEL.
 O rimorso! o terror! o infernal giorno

Di supplizio e di morte! Ah! qual mi serbi,
Ira giusta del Ciel, vicenda estrema!

[entra nelle stanze indicate]

(Atto Quarto - Scena VI)

(Il teatro moderno applaudito. Tomo IV, Amleto - Tragedia del Signor Ducis tradotta dal N.U. Francesco Gritti, Venezia 1796, p.59)

The next mention, in chronological order, of a performance of Hamlet is in Vincenzo Monti's dedication of his first volume of poems to Ennio Quirino Visconti in 1779, where he writes:

...senza essere fanatico per Shakespeare io so d'avere sparso in pubblico teatro delle lagrime sulle sventure di Giulietta e Romeo, e di esserne altra volta partito pieno di terrore e raccapriccio per i furori di Amleto.⁷

After a gap of twelve years, in 1791, Antonio Morrocchesi presented what is traditionally considered the first official Shakespearian performance in Italy and, once more, this milestone in the history of Shakespeare reception was constituted by Hamlet. Morrocchesi a young and promising actor ⁸ at the start of his career (he was to become the most celebrated Alfierian actor and Professor of Oratory at the Florence Academy of Fine Arts), was well aware of how risky an operation the staging of "Amleto Principe di Danimarca" could be. That was probably the reason why Morrocchesi resolved to conceal his identity under the pseudonym of Alessio Zuccagnini.⁹ Actually, what attracted him in Hamlet was

⁷Quoted in M. Corona, La fortuna di Shakespeare a Milano. (1800-1825) Adriatica, Bari, 1970. The author's comment on this passage is the following: "E ovvio (...) che il Monti non poté che assistere a rappresentazioni raffazzonate vuoi ballettistiche, vuoi musicali o mimate, desunte molto arbitrariamente dalle tragedie di Shakespeare." p.42.

⁸Cfr. Francesco Righetti's description of Morrocchesi in his Teatro Italiano:

Fra tutti gli attori italiani da me veduti (...) nessuno ha presentato alla mia mente un contrasto più bizzarro quanto il nostro Morrocchesi, celebre attore tragico. Ben fatto della persona, braccia, coscie, gambe corrispondenti ad un corpo nè magro nè pingue. Un occhio vivo, una fronte spaziosa, bellissimi denti, in somma un bell'uomo. La sua voce era rauca, e mal atta a colorire tenere espressioni, imponente, terribile nell'espansione di violenti affetti; il suo portamento, il suo gesto erano nobili, e dignitosi, nè perdevano della loro dignità, e della loro nobiltà, che quando voleva dipingere gli oggetti fisici con gesti di contraffazione. La sua dizione ora lenta, ora precipitata, non era sempre quadrante colla qualità dei pensieri che doveva esprimere, quasi sempre sublime nella pittura di vive immagini, e nell'entusiasmo si trasportava talvolta al di là di quel confine stabilito fra la sublimità, e la stravaganza: infine nessun attore ha presentato all'occhio dell'intelligente osservatore maggior riunione di bellezze tragiche miste a difetti del tutto particolari. (Quoted in L. Rasi, Comici Italiani, Firenze. 1905, p.167)

⁹Cfr. B. Brunelli, "Interpreti di Shakespeare", Shakespeare degli Italiani. Società Editrice Torinese, 1950, Torino, p.XL.

the challenge of such a stimulating leading role, rather than the perception of the real value and meaning of the play as a whole.¹⁰ The play ran only one night at the Borgognissanti theatre in Florence, squeezed between two successful performances of Alfieri's tragedies *Mirra* and *Oreste*, to the bewilderment of an audience faced with such an incomprehensible play that ignored the Aristotelian rules completely; Shakespeare was still far from popular and the so-called giant from the North was considered an absolutely unperformable author by most Italian actors of the period.¹¹

The flop discouraged Morrocchesi from continuing his experiment, but his mixed feelings towards Shakespeare did not change, as later in his career, he wrote that without any doubt Shakespeare was the greatest English poet and a

genio sommo, e sublime, ma che ha lasciato in dubbio di decidere se maggiori sieno i suoi difetti, o i suoi pregi: leggendo le sue opere (dice Gaussier,) noi restiamo sorpresi della sublimità di questo vastissimo genio, ma non lascia sussistere l'ammirazione; egli ha dei tratti ove regna tutto il sublime, ed il nobile di Raffaello, ma a questi tratti succedono dei miserabili quadri degni di pittori da taverna.¹²

In the last decade of the 18th century, while Shakespeare still continued to be confined to literary disquisitions and kept away from stage performances, shrewd librettists and choreographers began to discover in his work an inexhaustible mine of stories which they could ransack with impunity, sometimes under the pretence of drawing on Shakespeare's Italian sources. At the same time they exploited the huge popular love for music, owing to which melodrama was always preferred to drama and the singer always aroused more interest than the actor. Shakespeare then entered this lively operatic tradition as little more than a simple name, but he was to inspire, a century later, masterpieces like

¹⁰Cfr. ibidem: "Il giovane esordiente in cui fremeva tanta passione per l'arte tragica (...) venne forse tentato dai passi sublimi che gli permettevano una declamazione via via perfezionata e, a giudicare da un suo trattato, fin troppo codificata."

¹¹Cfr. L. Bragaglia, *Shakespeare in Italia*, Trevi, Roma, 1973, pp.13-15. This author is however grossly mistaken in attributing the failure of Morrocchesi's first and only performance to the version "mal tradotta e mal ridotta negli zoppicanti versi di Alessandro Verri (già pubblicata nel 1769)", added to the "incongruenza della melodrammatica ad incomprensibile messinscena, del tutto contraria alle tradizionali leggi aristoteliche, cui il nostro pubblico sembrava non saper rinunciare. Di conseguenza il disorientamento generale."

¹²Cfr. Antonio Morrocchesi, *Lezioni di declamazione e d'arte teatrale*, Firenze 1832, p.91.

Verdi's last operas.¹³ Operas, semi-operas, tragic melodramas, tragic ballets, lyrical tragedies, pantomimic ballets were produced, following the first German example in 1773, and they regularly had happy endings and rewritings of the parts which were not acceptable to the taste of the period.¹⁴

These productions, imbued with the fashionable sentimentalism introduced through the French "comédie larmoyante" of the new bourgeois theatre, contributed in encouraging that taste for the melodramatic to which the failure of Shakespeare's plays in 18th century Italy is to be ascribed. The audience was both diffident and bewildered before the plays, as it had come to know the same characters through the deforming medium of the musical performances.¹⁵

The first Italian musical Hamlet was performed in 1790 by Luigi Caruso in Florence, while two more, also based on Ducis' adaptation appeared in the same year, 1792.

One was by G. Foppa and was performed in Padoa on the occasion of the Saint's Fair.¹⁶ In a very brief note to the reader the author explains: "Dalla rinomata tragedia AMLETO di M. Ducis ho tratto l'argomento di questo Dramma, sembrandomi che le robuste circostanze che accompagnano il soggetto, possano renderlo interessante al maggior segno". Foppa was a typical example of those librettists who found that Shakespeare's dramas, so full of movement and alive with human passions were particularly suited to the melodramatic form (especially after Ducis' 'improvements') while at the same time they were indifferent and insensitive to their authentic artistic value and deep significance of the complete integral works.

¹³Cfr. H. Gatti, Shakespeare nei teatri milanesi dell'Ottocento. Adriatica editrice, Bari, 1968, p.10.

¹⁴Cfr. Mario Praz, Caleidoscopio shakespeareano. Bari, 1969, p.197.

¹⁵Cfr. M. Corsi, "Interpreti di Shakespeare in Italia", Scenari. N.12, 1943, pp.374-376: "...ancor più che ai letterati, il tragico inglese riusciva agro agli spettatori. Si ripetevano volentieri i giudizi di Voltaire, specie quello che aveva definito Shakespearie "selvaggio ed ubriaco". Qualche critico scriveva di preferire i balli del Vigand alle tragedie del "barbaro del Nord"; e tutto questo non invogliava davvero i nostri attori a cimentarsi in simili avventure."

¹⁶AMLETO, Dramma per Musica - da rappresentarsi nel nobilissimo nuovo teatro - DI PADOVA - Nella Fiera del Santo - L'anno 1792 - In Padova - Per li Conzatti a S. Lorenzo.

The second Hamlet staged in the same year was a Tragic-Pantomimic ballet¹⁷ by Francesco Clerico¹⁸, performed during Carnival at the Scala Theatre. That was the first Hamlet to be performed on a Milanese stage, apart from Apostolo Zeno's Ambieto, at the very beginning of the century. In his address "AL RISPETTABILISSIMO PUBBLICO DI MILANO", Clerico writes:

È celebre l'AMLETO di Shakespear, da cui ne trasse Monsieur Ducis la sua rinomata Tragedia non meno terribile, che nobile e regolare. Dal fondamento di questa ho estratto il soggetto del mio Ballo tragico-pantomimo, appigliandomi soltanto alla sostanza del fatto per introdurre episodi più convenienti alla proprietà della danza, e alla tessitura di un Ballo.

L'onore a cui m'accingo di nuovamente riprodurmi in Patria, m'incoraggisce da un canto a esporlo con qualche fiducia, ma dall'altro, riflettendo alla scarsità del mio ingegno, mi trovo combattuto da giusta inquietudine, e d'invincibil timore.

L'unica speranza, che mi conforta è appoggiata soltanto all'umana clemenza di questo Rispettabilissimo Pubblico illuminato, il quale avendo altra volta compatito i difetti de' miei deboli lavori, si degnerà anche usarmi la stessa benigna indulgenza, che ora umilmente imploro col più profondo rispetto.¹⁹

Clerico summarized the plot of his Amleto as follows:

ARGOMENTO

Amleto Re di Danimarca fu avvelenato da suo fratello Claudio, quale aspirava ad usurpargli 'l Trono. Tanto accertamente eseguì il suo delitto, che alcuno non giunse a sospettarlo autore.

Il defunto Monarca lasciò Geltrude sua Moglie con un figlio, che portava il di lui nome. Amelia figlia di Claudio fu scelta dalla vedova Regina, e destinata sposa al giovane Principe.

Nel punto, ch'erano per celebrarsi le nozze ecco l'Ombra del Padre Amleto, che apparisce a disturbare la festa. Palesa al Figlio il perfido suo uccisore, e chiede ad esso vendetta.

La cospirazione, che forma Claudio per distruggere egualmente il nuovo legittimo Successore; i maneggi di Amelia coll'amante Amleto per salvare il di lei Padre, la morte di Geltrude, e quella del barbaro Regicida formano l'intreccio, sopra cui si raggira l'azione del presente Ballo, diviso in cinque Atti.

La Scena è in Elsenorre nella Reggia de'Re di Danimarca.

¹⁷Cfr. Ermes Visconti "Idee elementari sulla poesia romantica", Il Conciliatore. N.28, 6 dicembre 1818: "Il ballo pantomimico partecipa della poesia e della pittura. Paragonato alla prima ha l'inconveniente di una lingua di gesti povera, indeterminata e monotona, ma in compenso la lingua dei gesti sa esprimere le emozioni con una rapidità, di cui la declamazione non è suscettibile, vi unisce una nobiltà e una grazia di portamento e di passi molto affine alla magla della danza, ed è soccorsa dalla musica, la più veemente fra tutte le arti."

¹⁸AMLETO Ballo Tragico Pantomimo - da rappresentarsi nel Teatro. Grande alla Scala - Il Carnevale 1792. Composto e diretto DAL SIG. FRANCESCO CLERICO.

¹⁹As H. Gatti, op.cit., pp.24-25 observes, Clerico stresses his dependence on Ducis rather than on Shakespeare, whose name is only formally recognized as "celebre", because "ad essere utilizzato è, in effetti, il dramma di Ducis. A parte qualche modifica, il Clerico segue il Ducis assai da vicino, riducendo il dramma di Amleto alla tragedia del suo amore per Ofelia (chiamata (...) Amelia nel ballo)."

Initially, the general atmosphere of the ballet is a highly festive one, with Hamlet wearing a very smart purple robe and glittering crown. The ghost's appearance takes place in the midst of the celebrations for Hamlet's wedding with Amelia, Claudius's daughter, among flowers, lights, perfumes and the sound of gay music. The ballet goes on in the same delirious way, presenting a series of homicides, either successful or only attempted, with abundant supernatural elements, and typically melodramatic features such as faintings, cries, and protests. Curiously, there is no happy ending (and this is signalled in advance in the definition of *Ballo Tragico - Pantomimo*) and Amleto kills Claudio who had previously killed Geltrude. Finally:

Amelia vedendo il padre suo trucidato dal di lei amante, e credendo sì da esso abborrita si vibra un ferro nel petto e spira. L'orrore di sì tragico avvenimento, e la disperazione di Amleto per la perdita di Amelia chiude l'azione, e termina il Ballo con un gruppo rappresentante la comune desolazione.

Amelia who has nothing of Ophelia's sweetness as a victim carried away by circumstances, is the real heroine of the *Ballo*, and is actively engaged in saving both her father and her lover from death, while being at the centre of the Comelian conflict between love and duty invented by Ducis, before her own tragic death. Mention of a musical Hamlet before the end of the century is made by Collison-Morley, who quotes a letter from Luigi Cerretti, stating that the Court of Parma had prohibited a ballet of *Hamlet* in 1798 the day before it was produced, on the ground that it was "contaminato da cospirazioni e dalla morte dei sovrani".²⁰

In the summer of 1795 a prose performance of Ducis' Hamlet took place in Bologna, and this time it was a great success. The protagonist was a celebrated "figlio d'arte", Francesco Menichelli²¹, who probably tackled *Hamlet* in accordance with the traditional empirical

²⁰ Cfr. L. Collison-Morley, *op.cit.*, p.82.

²¹ Cfr. L. Rasi, *op.cit.*, pp.122-123:
MENICHELLI FRANCESCO. (...) Recitava le parti di innamorato, e il Bartoli lo dice nel 1781 di freschissima età. Lo vediamo capocomico nell'autunno del 1795-96 al San Cassiano di Venezia. (...) De' pregi del Menichelli come attore abbiamo un cenno nel *Teatro mod. applaudito* il quale dopo aver detto, che "seppe acquistarsi una gloria non disgiunta dall'utilità", venendo a parlar dell'*Amleto* di Ducis, applaudiissimo a Bologna col Menichelli protagonista, nell'estate del 1795, dice ch'egli "esprimendo con tragica energia il sopraeminente carattere del protagonista, seppe ricordare il gran Molé a tutti quelli che udito l'avevano a Parigi."

principles of the Commedia dell'Arte, adjusting Shakespeare to the same composite technique which allowed him to alternate farce, melodrama and gran-guignol in his repertory. No less than 55 years were necessary to arrive at the start of an unbroken and successful stage history of Hamlet in Italy, when Alamanno Morelli gave his first performance in Milan at the Re theatre at the end of 1851 (after a first isolated attempt in 1850 in Turin).²²

However, if Molé contributed to establishing Ducis' play as a permanent success in France, Menichelli's success remained an isolated event in the panorama of Italian theatre.

²²Cfr. B. Brunelli, op.cit., p.XLI:

Il primo interprete che riuscì ad imporre Amleto al pubblico italiano fu Alamanno Morelli. (...) Presentò la tragedia per la prima volta al pubblico torinese e dovette replicarla più sere tale fu il suo successo, rinnovatosi poi al teatro Re di Milano dove le repliche furono undici, ciò che per allora era un fatto inconsueto. Yorick, il critico più noto e apprezzato, scrisse un caldo elogio dell'attore, dicendo che la "pazzia ragionevole" di Amleto aveva trovato in Alamanno Morelli il più felice interprete.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to trace the slow, tortuous progress of Shakespeare's reputation in 18th century Italy, mainly seen through its focus on Hamlet.

The striking feature of the appearance of a wholly Italian Hamlet in 1705 was found to be its complete independence from Shakespeare, thus proving the extent of the ignorance about Shakespeare at the beginning of the 18th century in Italy, while also exemplifying the expectations of the Italian audience, not yet prepared for the reception of Shakespeare's works.

On the other hand, from the viewpoint of the story of Hamlet in its Shakespearian version, it was reconfirmed that the belated knowledge of Shakespeare and of Hamlet in particular in Italy went through an extremely tormented itinerary, implying a series of transformations, plunderings of the substance of the original text, transpositions from dramatic to melodramatic and even ballet form. This difficult process was complicated by the French cultural mediation; its powerful classicist influence was confirmed as the major obstacle in making Shakespeare known and appreciated in Italy but at the same time it provided the Italian literary world with the only available instruments for the knowledge of Shakespeare through its translations and, at a later time, through the concealed Shakespearian influence of its successful bourgeois theatre.

The impact of the work and different personality of the very few and really "enlightened" Shakespeare connoisseurs has been seen in the general context of the Italian 18th century cultural background.

The importance of Conti's judgement on Shakespeare has been assessed more from a historical than from a critical point of view, while his approach to Shakespeare has been studied in the context of his very personal conception of classicist dramatic rules. Paolo Rolli's published translation of the "To Be or not To Be" monologue has been emphasized as the starting point of Hamlet's association with the first landmarks in the history of Shakespeare's reception in Italy in the 18th century.

Rolli's overall impact on Italian literature, in view of this pioneer work, deserves to be revalued, in contrast with his rather low reputation as simply a "Pastore Arcade". His most significant contribution lies in the fact that he not only provided the Italian public with the first piece of Shakespearian writing published in Italian, but started a characteristic trend of scrupulous honesty in translation to be followed later by Domenico Valentini, Alessandro Verri and Giustina Renier-Michieli. He may then be considered as the initiator of a typical Italian attitude to Shakespearian translation that is very different from Voltaire's clever but rather dishonest way of using translation to suit his polemical purposes, or from La Place's way of summarising large portions in his own words or omitting other parts.

Voltaire has been, of course, an unavoidable reference point throughout this study. His well-known paradoxical position as the greatest contributor to Shakespeare reception in Europe (and especially in Italy owing to the very tight Franco-Italian relations of the period), and his fanatical classicist stance according to which he became Shakespeare's most obstinate detractor, has been discussed especially from the viewpoint of his relationship to Hamlet (also including a brief panorama of Voltaire's Italian connections involved in some way in Shakespearian matters, who were deeply influenced by him in a negative sense).

The battles of Rolli and Baretti against Voltaire were also fought on the same terrain, as I have endeavoured to show, and their successful efforts may well have been the most important factor in bringing about a better knowledge of Shakespeare in Italy, and also in giving Hamlet a special kind of popularity in Italian critical circles unlike any other Shakespearian play. These two apologists for Italian literature in England, who succeeded one another in London in the course of the eighteenth century, although extremely different as to individual character, experiences, cultural background, had a number of features in common. One was a first-hand knowledge of Shakespeare at a time when Shakespeare in Italy was either unknown or known in a deformed way through French mediation in its various forms (from Voltaire's comments and pseudo-translations, to La Place's paraphrases, to Ducis' travesty) and the other was that, in reaction to Voltaire's classicist

dictatorship they pleaded for a new trend in literary criticism which anticipated many of the concepts which were to become the core of the Italian Romantic movement.

Alessandro Verri, as the first and only translator of Hamlet in 18th century Italy, has been the object of special attention here. His translation is a peculiar case in the history of Shakespeare reception in Italy in the 18th century, as it remained unpublished and could therefore have no direct impact on contemporary Italian literature. Verri's subjective relationship to Shakespeare in general and Hamlet in particular can be considered as it were "from within", thanks to the vantage point of his private correspondence with his brother. This privileged channel of communication is extraordinarily important because it highlights the tortuousness and secrecy of the path followed by knowledge of Shakespeare in a country where such knowledge could only be the patrimony of very few chosen intellectuals.

Verri's strategy of translation is a peculiar two-stage process in which the first absolutely literal source-oriented draft shows a very humble, modest, hard-working approach, followed by the ruthless elimination of all obscurities (in accordance with Verri's typical 18th century love for clarity and simplicity) in the second draft, which appears completely target-oriented. In reading the first draft one can almost hear Alessandro's voice expressing doubts, making comments, attempting critical judgments. The Osric episode, quoted at length¹, offers an effective example of this particular sort of dialogue between the translator and the text to be translated.

Three passages of different nature (narrative speech, monologue, dialogue) which therefore require different skills, were selected in order to illustrate Verri's style as a translator.

The eloquent narrative style of the first passage appeared to be particularly suited for Verri's flowing prose, where the ease of colloquial language is successfully fused with the simple solemnity of the historical account. The most important thing about this example is that it illustrates with great evidence the way in which typical pre-Romantic elements such

¹Cfr. *supra* pp.135-137.

as mysterious and gloomy scenes, involving supernatural appearances and reflected in a particularly sensational description of the natural landscape inspired by Shakespeare were to be incorporated in Verri's own creative work. This indirect reappropriation of one of Shakespeare's most important aspects which was to become a vital part of the Romantic movement in Italy was brilliantly anticipated by Verri as early as the middle of the 18th century, as is proved by the fact that he borrowed significant details from this scene for his novel Notti Romane.

As to the second passage, it has seemed useful to compare it with Voltaire's translation, in order to show the already mentioned difference in their attitude towards Shakespeare's text, but also, more interestingly, because it seems to prove Verri's way of personalizing in a very intimate, intense search for self an otherwise impersonal invocation both in Shakespeare and Voltaire. This important translation shift can be considered, again, a signal for those same pre-Romantic inclinations which Verri was to transfer into novel form - yet another proof of the indirect itinerary which Shakespeare's influence on Italian literature was to take before being openly acknowledged in the following century.

The third example shows Verri's quite good general understanding of the text and successful reproduction of Shakespeare's short lines almost bordering on prose, both in the quick repartee dialogues and in Hamlet's touching "confessional" speeches. The pronoun shifts, highlighting the progressive self-disclosure and growing intimacy in Hamlet's relationship to Horatio, are all punctually translated by Verri except for the last one, which in actual fact appears to be the most significant, thus showing that for all his scrupulous honesty, Verri was bound to let the subtlest nuances of meaning escape his notice.

Verri's relationship to Voltaire is not easily definable: while on the one hand, unlike Rolli and Baretti, Verri was not one of his declared enemies and did not even seem to mind Voltaire's attacks on Shakespeare too much (probably because he had deeply absorbed Voltaire's proverbial "beauties-faults" approach), he was on the other hand such a whole-hearted admirer of Shakespeare that he could never be a champion of the classicist rules for which Voltaire fought assiduously all his life. His position can perhaps be made clearer if

compared with that of Domenico Valentini, the first translator of a complete Shakespeare play into Italian (indeed, in any European language). Probably owing to his eccentric character and secluded life, Valentini was one of the very few Italian men of letters totally immune to Voltaireian ideas, and he makes this clear in his preface to Julius Caesar, supporting his subversive opinions with well-chosen and witty classical quotations. Therefore Valentini appears to reach an understanding of Shakespeare through purely intellectual means, whereas Verri being intellectually conditioned by his enlightened cultural background could not reach the same understanding through any other means than the emotional pre-Romantic component in him.

Verri's enthusiasm, however, was not unmixed as it was constantly mingled with a sense of great isolation and awareness of the long, difficult way Shakespeare's reputation still had to go in Italy. As the selection from their correspondence on Shakespearian matters shows, Pietro too shared these pessimistic feelings, but being a much more active and concrete man, he clearly saw how important the publication of Alessandro's translations would have been in accelerating that process, and tried to back it in every way, but without success.

Alessandro's achievement appears to be even more important, when seen in the context of the available French material on Hamlet (Laplace, Ducis, Letourneur)² and of the staging of the Italian translation by Gritti of Ducis' adaptation (a version which could be considered as being at a third remove from Shakespeare's original) and this adds to the regret for a missed opportunity in the history of Shakespeare reception in Italy.

The unexploited value of Alessandro Verri's work in Shakespearian translation can best be assessed when it is seen against the larger background of contemporary debates on translation, as well as of the bulk of the texts of foreign modern literatures being actively

²Their "prefaces", "avis", "avertissements" form however an interesting panorama of contemporary French views on Shakespearian translation, which, added to the various Italian prefaces quoted in the present study, might form an interesting corpus of critical texts on 18th century translation worthy of more detailed investigation.

translated throughout the 18th century in Italy, more often than not through French mediation.

Conti, Rolli and Cesarotti, as the translators of the most important neoclassic and pre-Romantic English authors, were responsible for directly enriching the Italian poetic language with a repertory of new words expressing different political, economical, social realities on one side and pathetic, horrific, sensational new themes on the other.³ Alessandro Verri unfortunately failed to introduce an even more precious linguistic treasure into Italian literature through his translation of Shakespeare's most significant play and his impact was an indirect one, through his own creative writing. However, a great deal of work remains to be done in the field of Verri's Shakespearian translations, which are still to be explored extensively (possibly in the direction I have attempted to trace) and which still await publication after a delay of more than two hundred years.

³For more details on this subject, cfr. G. Gronda, Le passioni della ragione - Studi sul Settecento. Pacini, Pisa, 1984, pp.76-82.

APPENDIX I

Saxo's tale of Amlethus and its derivations in Apostolo Zeno's Ambleto and Shakespeare's Hamlet - A comparison of the treatment of their common source.

Zeno's total ignorance about Shakespeare's Hamlet is a striking reconfirmation of the well-known difficulties undergone during Shakespeare's introduction into the Italian literary system,. A comparative survey of the strange itinerary followed by the original Danish legend through the English tragedy to the Italian "dramma per musica" may be useful as a concrete example of the difference between their respective cultural backgrounds and between the expectations of their respective audiences. It may therefore help to clarify the reasons why Shakespeare's reception in 18th century Italy could not have an easy, unhindered development.

What we certainly can take for granted from the way in which Shakespeare and Zeno manipulated, with an interval of almost a hundred years, the same ancient Scandinavian legend in their individual creative reception of it, is that Saxo's tale must have appealed to the imagination of both because of its extraordinary dramatic potentialities which they developed in very widely different ways. The passage from an oral form dating back to prehistoric times to an early Northern European literary form, and the subsequent introduction into two different modern European literatures in different dramatic forms has been summarized in the four tables at the end of the appendix.

As can be seen in Table I the evolution of the Hamlet story can be subdivided into three stages. The first one covers the misty pagan origin of the oral story in prehistoric times which, notwithstanding the great amount of extant scholarly work is still an open problem.

The second stage reflects the process of literalization from the oral material into a Latin prose narrative written by Saxo at the end of the 12th century, in which the Danes' history was traced from their eponymous ancestor Dan to Saxo's own times. Amlethus'

little biography, placed during the reigns of Roricus and Vigletus, occupies the end of Book III and the beginning of Book IV. This text is also an object of discussion among scholars as to the importance and role of its various components such as the supposed borrowings from the Lucius Giunius Brutus Roman legend and the elements indisputably derived from Danish folk traditions, Icelandic sagas and poems, etc.

Stage III is the passage from prose narrative to drama, taking place in 17th century England and 18th century Italy respectively as regards Shakespeare and Zeno, while no dates are available with regard to Ur-Hamlet. Both Hamlet and Ambleto share the general characteristics of this formal transformation of a reported story into an enacted one, moving from the objective narrative world into the subjective dramatic, while both characters and audience are engaged in the same search for objective truth. They also have in common a heavy treatment of the source materials, as both authors freely re-elaborate the plot and the form, as well as the telling of the story.

Table II shows the lists of characters in Saxo, Shakespeare and Zeno. These lists seem to reflect the different degrees of complexity in the three stories. Zeno's, the simplest and most superficial one, has very few characters; Shakespeare's, the most profound and sophisticated one, has the highest number. Saxo's tendency to leave some characters unnamed is probably a consequence of Danish oral story-telling tradition, which tended to make less use of proper names than the Icelandic one. Shakespeare and Zeno do not follow Saxo's example, but it is to be noted that Zeno tried to be more faithful than Shakespeare to the German character of the names he used.

As can be seen in Table III, both Shakespeare and Zeno chose exactly the same portion of Saxo's tale, the first section placed at the end of Book III, dealing with Amlethus' early career and revenge, and left out the second section at the beginning of Book IV dealing with Amlethus' access to power as Fengo's successor, followed by his second journey to Britain. During the first journey in the first section, he had outwitted the faithless escorts sent by the usurping uncle through the device of a re-written letter and had finally married the king's daughter. In the second journey, his father-in-law, the British king, as revenge for Fengo's death, tries to arrange for Amlethus' death by despatching

him to ask on his own behalf the hand of Hermutruda (the ferocious queen of Scotland whose normal practice is to murder her suitors), thinking that in this case she will also kill the messenger. But Amlethus himself marries her and subsequently manages to defeat the British king. He eventually returns to Denmark with both the Scottish and the British wife, but is defeated and killed in battle by Roricus' successor, Vigletus, who finally marries Hermutruda. As we see in the first column of Table III, in the introductory part the hero responds to the problems brought about by the villain; in the central part the tension between villain and hero is illustrated through the three tests and finally the initial problems are solved in the conclusion.

An interesting coincidence with regard to Shakespeare's ghost is that in Ambleto too a royal ghost is mentioned as appearing in Gerilda's dreams, but, differently from Shakespeare, it never appears on stage in accordance with 18th century dramatic rules. Ducis, at the end of the century solved the problem by letting the ghost appear only to Hamlet, which meant that it did not appear on stage at all!

Saxo, in accordance with his oral story-telling heritage, gives a strictly chronological and single-stranded account of events, starting from the chivalric duel between Horwendillus, Amlethus' father and Collerus, King of Norway. Horwendillus had been previously appointed by Roricus, King of Denmark, as governor of the land of Jutland together with his brother Fengo. Shakespeare and Zeno, on the contrary, differ radically here from their common source, and start their plots "in medias res", subdividing them in a number of subplots. Shakespeare's important additions such as the Ghost, the Polonius family story, the travelling players, Hamlet's scheme of the play-within-the-play, the cemetery episodes, the final duel, all contributed to the depth and complexity of the play, whereas the additional subplots in Ambleto consist in a typically melodramatic interweaving of love stories.

Veremonda is the character corresponding in Saxo to the beautiful woman sent by the king to tempt Amlethus in the woods, while in Shakespeare the corresponding character is Ophelia. Veremonda is a glamorous, strong-willed princess whose army has been

defeated by the commander-in-chief of the Danish troops Valdemaro, but has subsequently become the unwilling object of Valdemaro's love.

Another love story had taken place in the past between Ildegarde (a wholly Zenian creature) and Fengone who had betrayed her in order to marry his brother's widow Gerilda and get the throne, but now Ildegarde is head over heels in love with Ambleto and is therefore Veremonda's rival. In his turn, Fengone too, has fallen in love with Veremonda and persecutes her with his passion. These intertwined love stories really give the impression of purely melodramatic frills only intended for light entertainment, marking typical aspects of "dramma per musica" which were greatly favoured by the Italian 18th Century audience.

In the first part of Saxo's story the noble rivalry between Horwendillus and Collerus strongly emphasizes respect for ancient chivalric norms and contributes to building up the contrast between the characters of Horwendillus and Fengo, which comes out more clearly in the next stage of the story: when Horwendillus, after winning the duel and accomplishing many other valiant deeds is accepted by Roricus as husband of his daughter Gerutha, who subsequently gives birth to Amlethus. Horwendillus' successes awake Fengo's envy and when the opportunity arises he kills his brother. Fengo then adds incest to crime and marries Gerutha, making her believe that Horwendillus hated her and that he had decided to save her from his brother by killing him. In this way the finishing touches to Fengo's portrait are hypocrisy and deceit, and it must be recognized that there is a noticeably deeper insight into Fengo's character than Shakespeare offers in the corresponding character of Claudius. In fact the mechanism of murder is set going in Fengo by an overwhelming sense of envy of his more brilliant, nobler, luckier brother Horwendillus and he is irresistibly carried away by his envy into killing him and marrying Gerutha through deceit. In Shakespeare the main spring of criminal action seems to be, more simply, in Claudius' lust for power, whereas Zeno not only does not mention the duel, but does not even trouble to explain Fengone's reasons for murdering his brother.

In the introductory part both Shakespeare and Zeno maintain the same sequence of events as Saxo: the fratricide, the incestuous marriage, the protagonist's pretence of madness in order to accomplish his revenge.

Zeno reflects Saxo's constant focusing on action, which is directly inherited from his distant oral sources, for example the involvement of the whole Court, many influential members of which give the protagonist their friendly assistance. In Shakespeare the main emphasis is on a very subtle study of character: Hamlet is a completely isolated individual, whose only friend has no power at all. His psychological problems stem from the tormenting ambivalence of being both victim and offender, and appear even more complex when compared to the simplicity of both Amlethus and Ambleto who come out so much more simply-mindedly virtuous, courageous, and coherent in their unswerving pursuit of revenge. In Saxo this element is derived from the oral story-telling tradition in which each character is neatly characterized only in one direction, without any subsequent psychological development. In the case of Zeno it is not only a reflection of Saxo's attitude but also the typical tendency of "dramma per musica" to use simplification and superficiality in the portrayal of characters.

The concluding section in Table III shows the final revenge which is successfully acted out in all three stories, but only in Shakespeare at the cost of the hero's life, in accordance with the traditional pattern of Elizabethan revenge drama in which bloodshed, however justified, is always punished as morally condemnable from the point of view of the Christian ethos. This problem does not exist in Saxo's tale, as Amlethus still obeys the pagan code of honour, according to which private revenge is just the expected thing to do. As for Zeno, the Italian 18th century audience certainly shared the Elizabethans' ambivalent feelings with regard to the sanguinary revenge performed by the hero, but was finally gratified by the happy ending.

Ambleto is a simple man, who is not so witty and refined as Hamlet, nor so cunningly wise as Amlethus, but he shares something of Amlethus' Germanic primitiveness. A far cry from Hamlet's problematic approach to revenge, Ambleto appears to feel almost the same barbaric relish as Amlethus in giving his enemy a cruel death.

However, no murder is ever enacted on stage in Ambleto in accordance with 18th century standards of decorum.

The radical difference with regard to the problem of revenge should perhaps be accounted for as influencing the very different conclusion of the stories. Hamlet's genuinely tragic situation is that of a hero who is trying to overcome difficulties greater than himself, who "in seeking to right a wrong, commits one" and in whom "potentialities for good and evil hauntingly coexist".¹ Revenge drama, so popular in England between 1580 and 1640, of which Hamlet is a most complex and subtle version, nearly always followed the same plot pattern: a protagonist with whom the audience sympathizes pursues his own private revenge against a wrong-doer who has murdered some relative of his. While accomplishing his scheme he usually perishes, too. At this point the audience feels a double, contradictory gratification: a rational civilized feeling in response to the hero's death because of his socially dangerous and morally wrong act of taking justice into his own hands and an emotional primitive feeling in response to the success of the scheme which has redressed a wrong and punished the good hero's despicable enemy. The crucial problem of enabling the hero to take bloody revenge without incurring moral condemnation is solved by Shakespeare by showing that the hero kills instinctively, in an act of self-defence.

The same formula has been adopted down the centuries to our own time, when countless western films, crime films, televised melodramas and popular thrillers still make extensive use of it. However, in contrast with the Elizabethan revenge drama pattern, there has been a growing tendency to give the story a happy end in which the hero escapes death, even if by a hair's breadth, after taking his revenge. Interestingly, this type of epilogue can be found in Hamlet's ancestor, "Vita Amlethi": Saxo's tale might well be seen therefore as the thousand-year-old archetype of the successful cowboy story in which help always comes at the right moment and the hero regularly survives.²

¹Cfr. Jenkins, *op.cit.*, p.146.

²For more details on this discussion on revenge drama, cfr. C. Watts, *op.cit.*, pp.55-58.

As regards plot, we can see in table IV, that on a very basic level, more similarities can be found between Saxo and Shakespeare than between Saxo and Zeno, and in some cases very important background elements are omitted so that Zeno's version appears to be remarkably impoverished.

In the case of the hero's untidiness - brought to an extremity of filth in Amlethus and only hinted at in Hamlet - Zeno flatly reverses the original conception and gives Ambleto an unfailingly spotless and attractive appearance, which is admired by the two girls in love with him while they express their pity for his mental state.

Another reversal is operated by Zeno with regard to misogyny, which is personally acknowledged by Saxo as his own and attributed to Hamlet by Shakespeare. In Zeno there is no trace whatsoever of misogyny; the female characters, far from being fickle and lustful creatures, are all remarkably faithful and tenacious in their love stories. This is an aspect which can be considered typical of Zeno's time, when the position of women both from a social and intellectual point of view, tended to be revalued.

No mention is made either in Zeno or Shakespeare of Amlethus' only activity, the fashioning of barbed rods (with which he will in the end nail the sleeping lords of the Court to a hanging his mother had been instructed to weave during his absence, so that they will perish when he sets fire to the royal hall). However, in Saxo, Amlethus' extraordinary skill as a craftsman is the main source of suspicion at Court about his true mental state, and is also the origin of the idea of the three tests. The lack of the crucial detail of the rods both in Hamlet and Ambleto highlights the very different nature of Amlethus' revenge, so carefully thought out and well organized and also involving the cooperation of his mother, in comparison with the rather improvised nature of both Hamlet's and Ambleto's revenge. Hamlet seems to make up his mind quite suddenly, after so many tormented meditations and a false start; Ambleto organizes his coup d'état in a very straightforward, typically melodramatic way.

From a structural point of view, the central section of the story is quite similar in Saxo and Shakespeare as regards the second and third test, whereas the first test, although it contains the same formal elements (a pre-arranged meeting with the girl the hero is

supposed to be in love with), has a widely different impact. Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet, involving so many complex feelings and emerging in a battle of words, has nothing in common with Saxo's straightforward description of the lovemaking scene taking place in the thick of the woods, where Amlethus carries the girl, Tarzan-like, in order not to be discovered. In Zeno the scene also takes place in the woods, therefore following Saxo's model closely from the point of view of the setting, but again it is only a verbal encounter. There is an original addition, though, when the girl gives Ambleto a warning by writing in the sand, and the hero promptly starts another mad scene and tries to kill the king who is eavesdropping on them.

The bedroom scene in the second test seems to be the one where the barbaric violence of the source text has left the strongest trace both in Shakespeare and Zeno. Although the powerful animal imagery used by Amlethus is omitted both in Zeno and Shakespeare there is still a great driving force beneath Hamlet's and Ambleto's attack on the Queen. It is interesting to observe how this same scene in Ducis' "larmoyante" version at the end of the 18th century is sentimentalized to such a point that Hamlet goes so far as to ask the ghost to forgive his mother.

As regards the third test, Zeno discards the journey to England and sets it in the much more domestic atmosphere of a banquet where he adopts the much-exploited stratagem of the secretly drugged cup (yet another point in common with Shakespeare).

While Zeno totally omits the savage crudely realistic elements which are crucial in Saxo's concise Latin narrative (the killing and disposal of the spy by Amlethus, the lovemaking in the woods, the filthy appearance of Amlethus as a madman, the cold-blooded programmed extermination of the whole court), in Shakespeare there persist some weakened but still barbaric reflections of these elements in Hamlet's killing of Polonius, in his untidy appearance and in the mountain of corpses piled up on stage at the end of the play. Zeno's omissions can be justified as being in accordance with the type of dramatic form chosen by him and, with his respect for the aesthetic principles of 18th century decorum. In Shakespeare's case these elements surface periodically, though in a concealed form, accounting for the typical patchwork texture of Hamlet, where these relics from the

archaic pagan tale contrast vividly with the portrait of Hamlet as a refined Renaissance prince. These elements were considered inexplicable inconsistencies by critics until recently, whereas the latest contemporary trend in Hamlet criticism tends to interpret the very contradictions and paradoxes as an integral part of the play.

An aspect of the source text which appears to be rather effectively preserved both in Shakespeare and Zeno is the riddling character of Hamlet's speech, along with the characteristic feature of speaking the truth in such a paradoxical way as not to be believed. On the contrary, neither Shakespeare nor Zeno attempt to reproduce quite the same grotesque streak of clownlike humour which Saxo derived from his own ancient prehistoric sources. There are flashes of a prehistoric mythic spirit in Amlethus' use of mimicry, in his crowing, flapping his arms like wings, jumping up and down on the bedding in the spy-killing scene. There is also a sort of prophetic obscure wisdom in his riddling answers to the courtiers, in such a way as to be telling the truth without every being believed. Last but not least, the primitive side of his personality is powerfully expressed in his ruthlessness, his eroticism, his vigorous feats of vengeance against the courtiers and against Fengo. Hamlet, on the other hand, also makes use of intentional obscurities, wordplay, puns, while a trace of Amlethus' bizarre behaviour and attire can be found in Ophelia's report of her meeting with him, as well as in his savage treatment of Polonius' corpse. However, these are only marginal aspects of his personality, while his ambiguity and psychological complexity have undoubtedly a purely Shakespearean imprint and go deeper into the core of his character.

If we then compare Hamlet and Ambleto it is like descending from Mont Blanc to some prosaic meadow in very flat countryside. Ambleto has none of Hamlet's cultivated wit (nor Amlethus' cunning folk wisdom either); he is very simple and straightforward, telling the audience plainly in few words that he will feign madness because he will be killed otherwise. Ambleto's mad scenes are mostly mythological-pastoral-fantastic nonsense which are really very far from Hamlet's complexity of mind and intentions.

The three heroes are completely different in their attitude to love: Amlethus is quite deeply involved in erotic situations (the lovemaking scene in the woods, his double

marriage) which he enjoys in a genuine straightforward way. Hamlet is never quite convincing as a lover: his pronounced misogyny and irrepressible disgust for sexuality are very clearly expressed throughout the play. On the whole, his deepest thoughts on the matter are nearly always impenetrable to us. Ambleto, on the other hand, literally lives on love, which is the spring setting the whole world of "dramma per musica" into motion but again as has already been pointed out, there is always something slightly artificial about it.

As regards the feminine characters in the three stories, the Queen is always central and in all three versions her past guilt, present remorse and maternal love are emphasized along with her reluctance to give up her strongly sensual attachment to her second husband. In the case of Gerilda this sentiment reaches an almost pathological intensity in her schizophrenically divided mind: she keeps participating in plots against Fengone's life which she regularly reveals to Fengone just in time to save him. There is something in her obstinate faithfulness to an obviously villainous husband that could be compared with the tenacity of those wives of mafia bosses who will never let them down, notwithstanding their most ferocious crimes.

The evolution of the story of Hamlet from narrative prose into two different dramatic forms, while it obeys standard genre requirements (for example happy ending in melodrama, sad ending in revenge tragedy) as well as following typical tendencies of two different historical periods (strict sense of decorum of the Enlightenment period, free play of creative imagination in Elizabethan theatre) of course shows the difference in quality between one of the greatest playwrights of all ages and an honest craftsman of popular musical theatre when elaborating the same literary material. However, this comparison may be useful for the purposes of this study as a clear example of different dramatic structures answering widely popular expectations on the part of very different audiences.

TABLE I
The Evolution of the Hamlet Story

STAGE I ORAL TALES AND LEGENDS (Prehistoric times) (Prehistoric times) Icelandic Norwegian Ancient Roman (Varangian ?) ² Danish	STAGE II LITERARY TEXT (Written end 12th century, Published 1545, Paris) Process of literalization from oral Scandinavian tales into Latin prose narrative by Saxo. Light treatment of source materials (preservation of plot and form, re-elaboration of the telling of the story)	STAGE III DRAMA (17th-18th century) Process of transformation from prose narrative into drama Ur-Hamlet (?) Shakespeare Zeno Heavy treatment of source materials (re-elaboration of plot, form and of the telling of the story) Transformation of reported story into enacted story: No narrator " third person " omniscient observer " objective voice " absolute truth Movement from objective narrative world to subjective dramatic world. Both characters and audience engaged in same search for objective truth.	(a) Ur-Hamlet: Nature of the play un- certain.	(b) Shakespeare: From medieval Scandinavian prose narrative into English Renaissance verse drama.	(c) Zeno: From medieval Scandinavian prose narrative into Italian 18th century verse melodrama
--	---	--	---	---	--

TABLE II

Lists of characters

SAXO	SHAKESPEARE	ZENO
Roricus	—	—
Gerwendillus	—	—
Horwendillus	Hamlet (elder)	Orvendillo
Fengo	Claudius	Fengone
Collerus	Fortinbras (elder)	—
Gerutha	Gertrude	Gerilda
Amlethus	Hamlet	Ambieto
Fengo's friend *	Polonius	Iroldo
Foster brother *	Horatio	Siffrido (half-way between Polonius & foster brother)
Foster sister *	Ophelia	Veremonda
Escorts *	Rosencrantz & Guild.	—
Rex Britanniae	England	—
English king's daughter	—	—
Hermuthruda	—	—
Vigletus	Fortinbras	—
	**	Valdemaro
		Ildegarde

* The un-named characters in Saxo are probably a consequence of Danish oral storytelling style, which tended to make less use of proper names than Icelandic storytelling style, with its typical fondness for names.

** Shakespeare's characters not to be found in Saxo are not listed here (in total they are 23 single characters and various groups of crowd actors).

TABLE III

Structural Differences and Similarities

	SAXO	SHAKESPEARE	ZENO
	Story in Two Parts	Only First Part related	Only First Part related
INTRODUCTION			
Problems brought about by the villain. Hero's response	Starting point: chivalric duel then chronological account of successive events with no simultaneous subplots occurring in different places. Murder Throne Marriage Hero as Fool Emphasis focused on action (Participation of the whole court - Help for Amlethus)	Starting point: in medias res Flashback account of the duel as prologue to action, subdivided in various subplots. Murder Throne Marriage Hero as Fool Emphasis focused on character (Hamlet as a completely isolated individual)	Starting point: in medias res Flashback account of antecedent facts (no duel) action subdivided in various subplots Murder Throne Marriage Hero as Fool Emphasis focused on action. (Participation of the whole court - Help for Amleto)
CENTRAL SECTION			
Explanation of tension between villain and hero	Three tests: Woods episode Bedroom episode Foreign land episode	Three tests: Meeting with Ophelia Bedroom episode Foreign land episode	Three tests: Woods episode Bedroom episode Banquet
CONCLUSION			
Solution of initial problems	Successful Revenge Throne for Hero	Successful Revenge Death for Hero	Successful Revenge Throne for Hero

TABLE IV

Plot similarities between Saxo and Shakespeare's and Zeno's Versions

<u>Basic Elements in SAXO</u>	<u>SHAKESPEARE</u>	<u>ZENO</u>
Chivalric duel	X	—
Fratricide	X	X
Usurping uncle	X	X
Incestuous marriage	X	X
Persecuted nephew escapes by feigning madness	X	X
a) wide use of riddling and metaphorical language by hero	X	X
b) dishevelled, untidy state of hero	X	—
c) fashioning of barbed rods by hero	—	—
Oracular utterances of hero	X	X
Association of funeral with revelry & drunkenness (disreputable Danish national custom)	X	—
Fickleness and lustfulness in women according to author	X*	—
Hero submitted to three tests	X	X
a) Pre-arranged meeting with girl to whom hero is attracted (in Saxo she is a foster-sister) Failure of the test due to foster-brother's warning to Amlethus	X —	X X**
b) The scheme of the second test involves Fengo's feigned departure Hidden spy ruthlessly murdered - bitter reproach to faithless mother - mother's consequent support of son's cause	— X	X X
c) Journey to Britain - faithless escorts outwitted by hero through rewritten letter	X	—
Return during fake funeral	X***	—
Final revenge and killing of usurping uncle by means of an exchange of swords on the part of the protagonist	X	—

* According to Hamlet

** Amleto is warned by the girl herself

*** The funeral is a real one (It is Ophelia's)

Amleth Hærricks Datters søn Konge off
 der Dannemarch, haardt gjorde sig galn, og
 slog siden en meelig Konning død.
 (Handwritten text below the title)



Figure 1. Amblett. Probably the oldest picture of Hamlet.
 Courtesy of the Royal Library, Copenhagen



Figure 1. *Hamlet*. From a manuscript dated 1597.
Courtesy of the Royal Library, Stockholm

Amlets, : 20.



Figure 3. Amlets. From a manuscript written before 1638.
Courtesy of the Royal Library, Copenhagen



Figure 4. Amlets. From a manuscript dated 1658.
Courtesy of the Royal Library, Copenhagen

APPENDIX II

AN UNPUBLISHED TRANSLATION OF THE "TO BE OR NOT TO BE" MONOLOGUE BY G. RENIER-MICHIEL

RACCOLTA CORRER

Ms PD. 125. c.

Opere o non opere quest'è il gran punto. Manifestasi meglio la grandezza di un'anima nel tollerar tutti i mali e tutti i tormenti dell'insultante fortuna o nell'armarsi contro questo mare di guai, e tenendogli fronte troncarli affatto? ... Morire ... dormire, niente più, no e con un tal sonno possiamo dire a noi stessi: or poniamo fine a tutte le ambascie del cuore e a tutti queg'infiniti dolori che formano il parteggio naturale di quella misera carne ... questo punto in cui tutto viensi a confermare e a distruggere dovrebbe essere ardentemente desiderato. Morire - Dormire - dormire! Ah che forse intanto si sogna! questo, sì, questo è il grande ostacolo! poichè chi saper può qual sogno aver si possa in mezzo al sonno della morte quando resterem noi privi di questa spoglia caduca? Ecco l'idea, che ci sforza a pensare; ecco la causa vera che ci fa pazientare la calamità di una sì lunga vita; altrimenti a chè soffrir potrebbe la corruzione dell'età del costume, le ingiustizie dell'oppressore, gli oltragi dell'orgoglio, le torture di un amor disprezzato; l'indugio all'esecuzione delle leggi; l'arroganza proterva de'magistrati e il vilipendio che il merito mal giudicato soffre dall'anima vile ed abbietta, quando con un picciol pugnale l'uomo ottener potrebbe un perfetto riposo? Chi non vorrebbe gemere e sottostare al peso di una vita sì grave, se non vi fosse il timore di un avvenire qualunque dopo la morte? L'ignota contrada dalla quale nessun viaggiatore ritorna, confonde la nostra mente, rende perplessa la nostra volontà, ed infine ci fa più presto reggere ai mali da noi già sperimentati, che andar incontro a quelli che ancora ci sono ignoti. In questo modo la coscienza ci riduce tutti codardi e l'insito calore della risoluzione s'ammorza, si scolora in faccia la pallida luce del pensiero, e gli stessi disegni con tanta audacia ed energia concepiti ritorcono¹ a questo aspetto, perdon perfino il nome di azione e si dileguano nel nulla.

¹spelling not clear

APPENDIX III

THE VERRI BROTHERS' CARTEGGIO ON THE SUBJECT OF HAMLET AND OF SHAKESPEARE IN GENERAL

The long-distance dialogue on Hamlet between the Verri brothers started when Alessandro sent Pietro the translation of the "To be" monologue, with a letter dated "Roma, 9 agosto 1769", Vol.III, Carteggio di Pietro e Alessandro Verri, a cura di F. Novati e E. Greppi, Agosto 1769-Settembre 1770, Milano, Cogliati 1911, pp.16-18. In this letter Alessandro summarized the plot as follows:

...il soggetto della tragedia è Hamlet, re di Danimarca, che è stato avvelenato da un suo fratello, d'accordo colla di lui moglie, i quali poi gli succedono al trono. L'ombra di Hamlet comparisce ad Hamlet, parimenti suo figlio di tal nome, ed escluso dal trono dallo zio. L'ombra narra a suo figlio e svela il misterioso veneficio e l'atroce delitto della moglie e del fratello. Questa è una gran scena. Il figlio Hamlet, escendo dal dialogo coll'ombra pieno di funeste idee sul cuore umano e sulla morale fa il famoso monologo che ha tradotto anche Voltaire e del quale ti voglio aggiungere la traduzione letterale una parola dopo l'altra.

.....
La traduzione è precisamente una parola dopo l'altra come il testo. Ho fatto anche altre traduzioni, che mi riservo di spedirti, quando le avrò ripassate, e quando tu avrai tempo di passar qualche ora colle mie Muse.

Pietro's answer, dated "Milano, 16 agosto 1769", ibidem, p.18, was enthusiastic:

Mi è stata carissima la traduzione che mi hai mandato della scena di Hamlet. Vi trovo una forza e una energia tutta particolare: tinte scure che fanno il loro effetto; niente di esagerato ma tutto preso dalla natura; sentimenti interessantissimi, ma eguali al cuore umano; al che molte volte i tragici, singolarmente i francesi, non badano abbastanza. Mi rallegra con te dei progressi che hai fatto.¹

Almost ten years were to elapse before Alessandro could announce to Pietro that the translation had been completed, in a letter dated "Roma, 9 aprile 1777", Vol.IX, op.cit., a cura di G. Seregni, Dal 1^o aprile 1777 al 30 giugno 1778, Milano, A. Milesi e figli, 1937, p.14:

¹It is interesting to note here the presence of some typically preRomantic keywords such as: "forza", "energia", "tinte scure", "natura", "cuore umano".

Io aveva cominciato anni sono la traduzione di Hamlet, tragedia di Shakespeare (...). Ora l'ho terminata e l'ho ridotta al netto. (...) A giudicare compiutamente e con cognizione di causa bisogna confessare che è poeta sovranò e che i suoi squarci nobili che sono molti sono il punto più elevato della poesia ed i suoi difetti hanno pure una certa stranezza e meraviglia, che indica essere parti di un ingegno straordinario.

Pietro, who had previously sent Alessandro a manuscript of his own pamphlet against torture, answered in a letter dated "Milano, 26 aprile 1777", Vol.IX, op.cit., p.28;

Ora, caro Alessandro, ti prego d'una grazia e sarà che, rimandandomi il mio manoscritto colle tue correzioni, tu vi unisca il tuo Hamlet, che leggerò con avidità e ti rimanderò prontamente.

Alessandro excused himself for not having sent Pietro's manuscript back and promised:

...lo riceverai con le poche riflessioni che ci farò tanto per farti vedere che sono il tuo critico perpetuo. Non ti posso mandare il mio Hamlet che alla stessa condizione ed anche più strettamente intesa e lo intenderai perché sei troppo avvezzo alla mia cattiva scrittura. (Letter dated "Roma, 3 maggio 1777", ibidem, p.31.)

The above letter crossed Pietro's letter of the same date, reminding again Alessandro of his request: "...caro Alessandro, aspetto l'Hamlet" (ibidem, p.34). Finally, on "7 maggio 1777", (ibidem, p.35) Alessandro was able to write: "Ti mando (...) il mio Hamleto, del quale non ho che lo scritto che ti mando e per conseguenza se il corriere è rubato, le mie povere fatiche sono deplorabili."; as Alessandro was aware that his translation could be really "hot stuff" for the normal Italian 18th century reader, in order to prepare Pietro psychologically for the inevitable shock, he warned him as follows:

Io desidero che tu prima di leggerlo, non ti aspetti da questo autore nè condotta, nè finezza di teatro: è un barbaro, è un mostro; a' suoi tempi non vi era idea di buon teatro in Inghilterra, nè altrove. Troverai degli scherzi dispiacevoli fra le cose sublimi. Sia tu prevenuto di tutto questo.

Alessandro, however was convinced that his brother would show the beautiful parts the appreciation they deserved, and concluded:

Quest'autore è così originale che sempre mi sembra nuovo. Restiamo ben d'accordo che ha dei difetti; non perdere di mira questa prevenzione.

In fact, Pietro certainly did not need any warning as to how to tackle such a text; his immediate response was:

Ricevo in questo punto il tuo col mio manoscritto. La Marietta² si è impossessata dell'Hamlet (!) e non l'avrò sinché non lo abbia essa divorato; per grazia però me ne ha letto de' pezzi. Mi piace sommamente. A nessuno altro verrebbe mai in capo di servirsi delle espressioni, che egli usa. Te ne dirò meglio il mio sentimento nell'ordinario venturo, dopo che l'avrò letto. Solamente ti prevengo, se mi dai licenza, che lo faccia stampare; mi pare che lo meriti e sarà subito spacciato molto più se si saprà da qual mano sorte. (Letter dated "Milano, 17 maggio, ibidem, p.45).

Pietro's first thought on receiving Alessandro's manuscript was of a very practical nature: he immediately saw that the publication of Hamlet could be a very good opportunity both from a cultural and a business point of view. A few days later Pietro gave Alessandro a more lengthy account of his impressions on Hamlet, and although he used the canonized Voltaireian terminology, his attitude to the same significant details used by Voltaire to defame Hamlet, was a long way from Voltaire's:

Ritorno all'Hamlet, pezza unica, miniera di fango e diamanti; io non potrei a meno di leggere quest'autore di seguito quand'anche avesse fatti cinquanta tomi di cose simili. Mi fa ridere a spese sue, e, mentre rido mi sforza ad ammirarlo. Poni una proposizione e un attore: chiama a te stesso cosa gli faresti rispondere, poi osserva e la risposta di Shakespeare è sicuramente diversa. E' un uomo isolato nella sua maniera di concepire gli oggetti. "Oh mia carne troppo solida, perchè non ti squagli?", "le scarpe non ancora logore della madre", il purgatorio, la superstizione, i sentimenti forti piuttosto che sublimi, il disordine del tutto e insieme, i beccamorti che trattano di teologia, cento cose impensate colpiscono. Non mai mi lascia annoiare; o dispiace o piace moltissimo. La Marietta ha letta e divorata quella pezza, i due nipotini parimenti e sempre esclamavano ad ogni passo per la meraviglia.

For all his enthusiasm and fascination for Shakespeare's work, Pietro never forgot practical matters:

Ora la faccio trascrivere. Se posso stamparla, ne attendo il tuo avviso. Sicuramente piacerà. (Letter dated "Milano, 28 maggio 1777", ibidem, p.49)

While giving details about the transcription,

Il tuo Hamlet si sta descrivendo dal figlio di Ghelfi, che ha assai buon carattere³, poi te lo spedisco; abbi pazienza frattanto, caro Alessandro. (Letter dated "Milano, 4 giugno 1777", ibidem p.53)

Pietro pursued his project of publication and tried to bring dreamy Alessandro down to earth:

²Pietro's young wife. Cfr. Appendix IV, for more details on her.

³Good handwriting.

Preparami una prefazione per l'Hamlet. dì qualche cosa dell'autore, de' tempi ne' quali visse, delle opere sue, del plauso ch'ebbe e in vita e poi, delle opinioni delle nazioni estere sul di lui proposito e de' passi inintelligibili, de' quali sarà curioso il darne una traduzione letterale. Io l'aggiungerei nell'Hamlet a suo luogo quello che vi è di inintelligibile. (...) Tu scriverai meglio da te solo e basta che io ti preghi a fare una prefazione, da cui risulti anche il motivo per cui si stampa una commedia sola, cioè per dare un'idea all'Italia di questo stranissimo e sublime scrittore del quale altri ne fanno un Dio, altri un pazzo.

Brilliant cultural operator as he was, Pietro had an intuition that the Italian literary world needed clearer, less biased information than that coming from Voltaire on the subject of such a controversial author. He therefore tried to induce Alessandro to publish as much as he could:

Pensa anche se vuoi stampare insieme anche la seconda che stai traducendo⁴ e allora unicamente adatta la prefazione in plurale, perché si stamperà subito l'Hamlet frattanto che termini l'altra. Bramerei che la prefazione fosse lunga e che fosse quasi l'essenziale, servendo le due pezze di prova delle cose in essa contenute. Un uomo come tu sei non esce dal silenzio da dieci anni per una traduzione semplice.

The idea that Alessandro had not published anything for ten years reminded Pietro of their young pugnacious years together in Milan, their successes and their premature retirement from the scene of national and possibly European Enlightenment:

Dammi il piacere (...) di rinnovare le memorie di quella cara epoca, nella quale vivevamo coltivando la ragione di concerto e procurando che fosse conosciuta nel nostro paese. Se Il Caffè durava, certamente un cambiamento doveva seguire verso la cultura. Eravamo in uno stato di guerra decisa e incessante contro la stolidità e ogni dieci giorni le davamo una scossa. Il nostro Caffè è tradotto in tedesco e se avesse continuato sarebbe diventato un libro europeo, perché noi pure ci saremmo gradatamente posti a un più nobile livello. (Letter dated "Milano, 11 giugno 1777", *ibid.* p.58.)

Alessandro was quite moved by Pietro's response to his work and let himself be carried away by his enthusiasm and his plans for publication:

Mi tocca il cuore il calore con cui hai letta la mia traduzione e l'incentivo che mi dai di farle una prefazione. Bisogna a questo fine che mi procuri una vita dell'autore e non so se vi sia. La prefazione che precede le di lui opere non basta a quanto desideri. (Letter dated "Roma, 18 giugno 1777", *ibid.* p.62.)

⁴ Alessandro had just informed him about his other Shakespearian translation: "Roma, 7 maggio 1777" *ibid.*, p.35: "Ora sto traducendo anche l'Otello, ossia Il Moro di Venezia". In this connection cfr. the exhaustive study by A. Busi, Otello in Italia (1777-1972), Adriatica Editrice, Bari, 1973.

However, he was far from eager to embark on this task, and also began to worry about the economic risk Pietro would be running (Pietro had always financed him generously, treating him more like a son than a brother) ⁵

Non ho difficoltà che si stampi l'Hamlet posto che ti pare che ne valga la pena. Egli è certo che non abbiamo in italiano una traduzione così fedele. Ma non posso credere che ti torni conto di farne la spesa, però pensaci; mi rincrescerebbe che vi dovessi rimettere il tuo danaro. Ti prego in ogni caso di correggere l'ortografia e di dirmi se trovi qualche passo oscuro. Sarà necessaria anche una breve prefazione, per render conto di alcune omissioni che ho fatto di passi oscurissimi ed assolutamente inesplicabili anche per gli Inglesi, a segno che Pope nella sua edizione ne ha tralasciato de' squarci. Stenderò questa prefazione e te la manderò. (Letter dated "Roma, 19 giugno 1777", *ibid.*, p.65.)

After some time Alessandro returned to the subject again and this time he appeared more doubtful about publishing his own translations, since Letourneur's had begun appearing in France:⁶

Nove anni sono io aveva tradotto l'Hamlet, ed era il primo che avesse tradotta letteralmente una intera tragedia di Shakespeare. L'anno passato si è cominciata a stampare a Parigi la traduzione di Shakespeare ed a quest' ora ne sono usciti già vari volumi: ho veduto sul Giornale Enciclopedico de' squarci e sono ben tradotti. L'opera ha per titolo: Shakespeare traduit de l'anglois, dédié au Roi. A Paris, 1776. Allora escirono due tomi: ma sono già esciti degli altri, non so quanti. Bisognerebbe che io avessi questa traduzione per giudicare se la mia vale la pena essere stampata, giacché il francese è tanto comune, che l'Italia non guadagnerebbe niente se fosse buona quella, di avere anche la mia. (Letter dated "Roma, 2 luglio 1777" Vol.IX, *op.cit.*, p.74.)

After announcing "la restituzione de tuo Hamlet, che possiedo trascritto" (Letter dated "Milano, 10 settembre 1777", *ibid.* p.125), Pietro waited patiently for the preface, which however did not arrive. When he finally resolved to ask for it ("Aspetto da te da alcuni mesi una prefazione contenente una idea di Shakespeare, per stampare lo stranissimo, e

⁵A moving testimonial of the strong link uniting the two brothers is in a letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 16 novembre 1766", to be found in folder N.57, at the Archivio Verri in Milan:

(...) Mi devo sempre rivolgere a te in tutte le mie occorrenze. Sei il solo mio amico maschio ed il solo mio benefattore, e mi tieni luogo di tutti gli altri uomini, anzi di tutto il genere umano eccettuata una sola persona.

Of course the person mentioned was Alessandro's lady-friend, the Marquise Gentili.

⁶Letourneur's translations had not escaped Pietro's notice, and he had signalled their future publication to Alessandro as early as "5 settembre 1772", Vol.V, *op.cit.* a cura di E. Greppi e di A. Giulini, Gennaio - Dicembre 1772, Milano, Cogliati, 1926: "Dai foglietti di Parigi veggo annunziata una terza versione di Shakespeare, che dicesi esatissima; se lo è, sarà interessante per chi non sa l'inglese."

interessantissimo Hamlet": letter dated "Milano, 3 giugno 1778", *ibid.*, p.308), Alessandro answered:

Ora certamente voglio cedere alla tentazione di stampare; ma potendo essere autore, mi par meglio di lasciare ad altri quella di traduttore⁷, per conseguenza non penso di stampare l'Hamlet. Prefazione poi non ne vorrei fare, perché è stata ampiamente fatta dall'autore francese, il quale e sulla vita, e sugli scritti di Shakespeare ha detto ogni cosa. (Letter dated "Roma, 10 giugno 1778", *ibid.* p.312.)

Even if Letourneur's Hamlet had not yet appeared, Pietro too agreed that it was now too late to publish Alessandro's translation:

Io sono d'accordo con te che l'Hamlet sia ormai inutile lo stamparlo, almeno col tuo nome. (Letter dated "Milano, 17 giugno 1778, *ibid.*, p.322.)

Pietro's final statement was the epitaph on the two brothers' long discussion, which unfortunately did not have those practical results which could have been so important for the history of Shakespeare reception in Italy.

An interesting side-aspect of the Verri brothers' correspondence on Shakespearian matters is connected with their exchange of practical information and especially with Alessandro's dependence on Pietro for ordering the books he wanted to read. As regards Letourneur's translations a non-stop chain of information went on between them from 1777 (when Alessandro wrote: "Travedo ne' giornali che in Francia si fa una traduzione di quest'autore", letter dated "Roma, 9 aprile 1777", Vol.IX, *op.cit.*, p.14) to 1782, as follows:

⁷Alessandro was of course alluding to Letourneur here.

VOL. IX

- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 2 luglio 1777", p.74.
Se codesto libraio francese⁸ avesse tale traduzione, mi faresti un sommo piacere di mandarmela. Intanto io ne darò la commissione per Parigi, giacché venendomi un duplicato, lo esitero facilmente.
- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 9 luglio 1777", p.81.
Nel venturo ordinario ti darò nuove di Shakespeare francese, del quale ne ho già commessa la ricerca.
- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 19 luglio 1777", p.88.
Il libraio Reicend s'è incaricato di far venire da Parigi Shakespeare nello spazio di tre mesi; subito che mi giunga l'avrai.
- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 16 agosto 1777", p.105.
Ho i primi due tomi di Shakespeare tradotti e dedicati al Re, te li spedirò quanto prima.⁹
- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 10 settembre 1777", p.125.
Infine il corriere d'oggi ti porta i due primi tomi del Teatro Inglese.
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 17 settembre 1777", p.127-128.
Ti sono molto e molto obbligato del Shakespeare (...). Mi hai consolato molto più presto di quanto speravo con questi libri; (...).

VOL X

- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 30 settembre 1778", p.89.
E' stata annunciata su di una gazzetta francese la continuazione di Shakespeare di cui se ne dice uscito il terzo volume; me ne hai mandati due, se mi mandi la continuazione sarà un vero ristoro (...).
- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 7 ottobre 1778", p.99.
Faccio ricerca per il terzo volume inglese.
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, ottobre 1778", p.104.
Ti sono obbligato della ricerca che fai del terzo volume di Shakespeare.
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 12 maggio 1779", p.270.
Vedo nel Giornale Enciclopedico che è uscito il 4^o e il 5^o tomo di Shakespeare tradotto in francese di cui mi hai già procurati per tua amicizia i due primi tomi,

⁸The Reicend bookshop in Milan.

⁹Pietro could not resist the temptation of reading the two volumes before forwarding them on to Alessandro. These were his impressions:

Ho letto Il Moro di Venezia: è una gran bella cosa in mezzo ai difetti suoi. Si vede l'uomo originale che non ha un modello avanti a sè, la passione portata al colmo e dipinta esattamente, modi sommamente energici, che ti sottopongono idee di sangue. Che infame quell'Jago! Che virtuosa donna quella Desdemona! Mi pare che qualche idea si possa aver somministrata al vecchio di Ferney per la Zaira.

(Voltaire as usual, was a reference point that could not be eluded).

Ora leggerò la Tempesta e il Cesare e poi te li spedisco.

However a further delay was announced in a letter dated "Milano, 3 settembre, 1777", Vol.IX, op.cit., p.121: "(...) i due tomi di Shakespeare che non ti spedisco oggi perché gli ho prestati."

onde ti prego di continuarmeli, cosa che mi sarà di non ordinario piacere, come puoi supporre."

- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 27 maggio 1779", p.281-282.
Ti sono molto obbligato per la premura con cui mi cerchi la continuazione di Shakespeare.
- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 16 giugno 1779", p.297.
Ho presso di me il terzo e quarto tomo del tuo drammatico inglese, e lo chiamo ancora il mio; lasciami leggere e lascialo leggere alla Maria e subito te lo spedisco.
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 23 giugno 1779", pp.301-302.
(...) aspetto i due tomi del divino Shakespeare (...)
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 14 luglio 1779", p.317.
Ti prego di non perder di vista i tomi di Shakespeare che ti languiscono fra le mani e de' quali ho smania. Ciascuno bada a' fatti suoi. Questo per me è un grand'affare.¹⁰
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 7 agosto 1779", p.342.
Ti abbraccio con l'anima, cento ossequiosi saluti alla cognata. Per amor del cielo, il dispaccio di mio padre e Shakespeare.¹¹
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 12 agosto 1779", p.345.
Mi farai gran piacere di mandarmi il dispaccio di nostro padre, il mio sospirato Shakespeare, signore dell'anima mia (...).

VOL XI

- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 28 giugno 1780", p.86
Sta sicuro, caro Alessandro, che non ho mai dimenticato il seguito della versione del nostro inglese e che oltre la premura che ho di servirti, la quale è bastante a tenermi svegliato, ho ancora una viva curiosità di leggere io, tanto più che, non sapendo io la lingua originale, non posso altrimenti gustarlo dopo di aver sentito con trasporto le bellezze de' primi drammi. Il nostro libraro francese sempre mi fa dire che sono in viaggio e che non dubiti che al momento saranno in mia mano.
- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 12 luglio 1780", p.97
Ti do nuova che finalmente 5, 6, 7 e 8 di Shakespeare sono in casa; lasciameli scorrere e prima di una settimana saranno nelle tue mani, Cleopatra e Antonio mi piace, sempre è uomo unico (...).
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 19 luglio 1780"; p.100
Mi dai un'ottima nuova facendomi sperare presto il sospirato Shakespeare. Credo che troverai molto interessante il Re Lear: almeno gl'Inglese la stimano molto per la passione del vecchio padre tradito da le sue figlie: Garik (sic) faceva da Re Lear, a segno di far alzare tutti i peli della cute agli spettatori.

¹⁰ Alessandro was evidently not pleased with the delay and his tone grew somewhat curt and impatient, as he probably worried about the volumes going through too many hands.

¹¹ Alessandro was almost driven to despair by now, but he tried a different strategy: a gentle and eloquently moving tone, which he also maintained in the following letter. However, he had to wait almost ten months before Pietro's reassuring answer reached him.

- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 19 luglio 1780", p.100
Oggi il corriere ti porterà franca una scatoletta co' quattro tomi ultimi di Shakespeare compreso l'ottavo."
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 23 luglio 1780", p.106
Ti ringrazio molto, e poi molto dei quattro tomi che ricavo franchi del sublime Guglielmo Shakespeare.

Vol. XII¹²

- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 12 settembre 1781", p.57.
(...) penserò a spedirti (...) alcuni tomi del tuo drammatico inglese nuovamente pubblicati.
- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 23 febbraio 1782"; p.203.
...ho i tomi XII e XIII di Shakespeare. Il primo contiene Arrigo Sesto e, il secondo Riccardo Terzo e Arrigo Ottavo. Ho cominciato dallo scismatico. Lasciami divertire con questo caro autore, e poi te lo spedirò.
- Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 11 maggio 1782": p.291.
Ti spedirò due volumi del nostro drammatico inglese.¹³
- Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 22 maggio 1782", p.297.
Ricevo franca la cassetta contenente (...) e il 12° e 13° tomo del nostro sorprendente Shakespeare. Non ti so sufficientemente ringraziare per tanto segno d'amicizia.

¹²Vol. XII, op.cit., Dal 30 maggio 1781 al 25 settembre 1782, a cura di G. Scregni, Giuffré, Milano, 1942.

¹³It is interesting to note that while Pietro had usually called Shakespeare "tuo drammatico inglese", he now calls him "nostro".

APPENDIX IV

THE VERRI FAMILY CIRCLE

The only known readers of Verri's translation seem to have belonged strictly to the Verri family circle; more precisely they were two chosen members of it, Pietro, its most brilliant representative, and his young wife Maria¹ who, in her husband's words: "...divorava i libri con prodigiosa rapidità". Alessandro had sent Pietro the manuscript of Hamlet. "il quale Dramma" Pietro wrote in answer, "ripieno di pazzie e di bellezze avidamente Maria l'aveva letto". This information is to be found in the introduction by G. Barbarisi² to a collection of manuscripts written by Pietro in the form of a diary in memory of Maria (who died after only five years of marriage, being 25 years younger than him), so that their first and only daughter could know her mother, in the hope, as Pietro explains to Alessandro in a letter dated "Milano, 24 ottobre 1781" that it "servirà un giorno alla Teresina di qualche istruzione".³ It was something more complex than the traditional "instructions pour mon fils", which were current in aristocratic and royal families of the period, owing to "quell'andirivieni continuo (tipico anche del carteggio con Alessandro) dall'esterno all'interno, che finisce per portare fortemente l'accento sull'introspezione e sulla sottile attenzione alla realtà psicologica tanto degli individui che delle classi sociali."⁴

Barbarisi identifies these papers as the account of a radical social transformation, involving a new outlook, new habits, a new conception of life and corresponding to the evolution in the family as a social institution situated by L. Stone⁵ between the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. This new development was based on an

¹There is also a mention of two nephews, who probably participated in reading sessions with them (Cfr. Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 28 maggio 1777", vol IX op.cit., p.99).

²P. Verri, Manoscritto per Teresa, a cura di G. Barbarisi, Serra e Riva, Milano, 1983.

³Cfr. *ibidem*, p.32.

⁴Cfr. *ibidem*, Introduction, p.XX.

⁵Cfr. L. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500-1800, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977.

"increment in affection" resulting in the subjective choice of a wife, the end of libertinism, the refusal of "la doppia morale" in family life, a revaluation of woman's position in the family as well as in society, echoing a new conception of the upbringing of children in the light of Locke's and Rousseau's teaching, based on freedom and love, rather than on the oppressive "patria potestà". The main elements of novelty in Pietro's thinking on the subject, apart from the main motivation (the need to address his five-year-old daughter in order to make her relive important childhood experiences, including the sometimes disagreeable details on the illness and death of her mother) are listed by Barbarisi as follows:

...la scrupolosa utilizzazione di ogni minimo dato dell'esperienza (il sensismo, è noto, si fa norma di vita), la lotta della ragione contro la natura (...) il culto della memoria (...) come strumento unico di sopravvivenza della persona perduta (...), l'autoanalisi liberatoria, l'ottimismo della fiducia nell'efficacia dell'insegnamento, nella forza della volontà. Ma il tema sempre dominante rimane sempre la ricerca della felicità, che per un genitore significa prima di tutto, come ha insegnato Locke, assunzione di responsabilità senza riserve di sorta, già nel momento in cui vien deciso di mettere al mondo un nuovo essere.⁶

The lifelong dialogue between Pietro and Alessandro through their correspondence portrays their sad childhood experiences in a grim household, dominated by a blindly repressive father, a cold overbearing mother⁷ and their disgusting economic "grettezza", the persecution of ignorant servants and boarding-school staff.⁸ A letter from Alessandro to Pietro, dated "Roma, 17 agosto 1770" on the subject ends with this eloquent peroration:

Perisca quel tempo scellerato nel corso dei secoli, ma non ne perisca la memoria che deve durare finché respiro e devo sfogare coi tuoi figli e far loro conoscere quello che

⁶Cfr. P. Verri, *op.cit.*, Introduction, pp.XXIII-XXV.

⁷There is a chilling description of them in a letter from Pietro running as follows:

Il solo principio predominante in nostro padre è un timore pusillanime. (...) La superstizione, la avarizia, figlia legittima della pusillanimità, così sono nate e cresciute in lui. Egli ci ha temuto sino da bambini e colla sua condotta ha cercato di avvilarci acciocché né colla educazione, né colla mente potessimo mai dargli ombra. (...) Nostra madre è un carattere duro, violento e nemico del riposo. La sua smania è dominare e distinguersi, il dispotismo di lei si estende ai pensieri persino delle persone, sulle quali suol signoreggiare. (Letter to Alessandro dated "Milano, 17 dicembre 1777", Vol. IX, *op.cit.*, p.180)

⁸In answer to some welcome news from Pietro about his newly-born daughter Teresa, Alessandro wrote:

Mi fa un piacere singolare il pensare che questa buona creatura è difesa dalla tirannia, e non passerà certamente la barbara trafila della solita educazione. Io sento con una vivacità che è l'evidenza di tutti i torti che mi sono stati fatti da fanciullo e in seguito, e odio con l'istessa forza e quei frati, e quei preti, e quelle donne e tutta quella canaglia che che fa da carnefice sugli innocenti per comodo de' barbari papà, e mamà, ostinati, orgogliosi, tirannici e bestialissimi, pazzi il più sovente. (Letter to Pietro dated "Roma, 13 maggio 1778", *ibidem*, p.287.)

ho sofferto e forse hanno da spargere qualche lagrima o di ribrezzo o di compassione od hanno da contemplare nel confronto quanto essi stessi sieno fortunati. Viva la ragione e la indipendenza della virtù: è venuto il suo tempo anche in casa Verri.⁹

⁹Quoted in P. Verri, *op.cit.*, Introduction, p.XXVI.

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A. Aquarone "Gusto e costume nell'anglomania settecentesca", Convivium. Anno XVI, 1958, fasc.10, nuova serie.
- M. Ariani, Drammaturgia e mitopoiesi. Antonio conti scrittore. Bulzoni, Roma, 1977.
- M. Baratto, La letteratura teatrale del Settecento in Italia. Neri Pozza, Venezia, 1985.
- G. Bertana, In Arcadia. Napoli, 1909.
- S. Bettinelli, Lettere virgiliane e inglesi e altri scritti critici. Bari, 1930.
- W. Binni, "Caratteri e fasi della letteratura italiana del Settecento", in Storia della letteratura italiana. Vol.VI, Garzanti, Milano, 1968.
- W. Binni, Preromanticismo Italiano. Bari, Laterza, 1974.
- E. Bonora, (a.c.d.) Illuministi italiani. Tomo II, Opere di F. Algarotti e S. Bettinelli, Vol.46, Ricciardi, Napoli, 1949.
- R. Ceserani, Raccontare la letteratura. Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 1990.
- M. Cesarotti, "Discorso premesso alla seconda edizione di Padova del 1772", in Poesie di Ossian antico poeta celtico, reprinted in La letteratura italiana - Storia e testi, a c. di E. Bigi, vol.44, tomo IV; Ricciardi, Verona, 1960, p.90.
- G. De Gambera, Prefazione a La madre colpevole. in Novo teatro. Prosperi, Pisa 1789, Vol.II.
- B. Dooley, "Pietro Pariati a Venezia", in La carriera di un librettista. a cura di G. Gronda, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990, p.41.
- G. Fiorio, Trattenimenti Teatrali. presso Domenico Fracasso, Venezia, 1791-94.
- U. Foscolo, Prose letterarie. Vol.II, Firenze, 1850.
- G. Gronda, Le passioni della ragione. Studi sul Settecento. Pacini, Pisa, 1984.
- G. Guccini ed., Il teatro italiano nel Settecento. il Mulino, Bologna, 1988.
- P. Hazard, "L'invasion des littératures du Nord dans l'Italie du XVIIIème siècle", Revue de Littérature Comparée. I, 1921.
- H.R. Jauss, Pour une esthétique de la réception. Gallimard, Paris, 1978.
- A.K. Kennedy, Dramatic Dialogue: the dialogue of personal encounter. Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- V. Lee, Il Settecento in Italia - Accademie - Musica - Teatro. Riccardo Ricciardi, Napoli, 1932, p.191.
- S. Maffei, Teatro tragico italiano o sia scelta di tragedie per uso della scena. Premessa, Vallarsi, Verona, MDCCXXIII, t.I, p.XXI.
- A Manzi, "L'istoria d'Amleto sulle Scene Italiane - L'Amleto italiano. La Rassegna Nazionale. Vol. CLXVIII, Milano, 1.7.1909.

- C. De Michelis, Letterati e lettori nel Settecento veneziano, Olschki, Firenze, 1979.
- L.A. Muratori, Della Perfetta Poesia italiana, Modena, 1706.
- A. Pepoli, La gelosia snaturata o sia la morte di D. Carlo infante di Spagna in Teatro, Palese, Venezia, 1787-1788, vol.I, p.2.
- Raccolta di tragedie scritte nel secolo 18^o, vol.I, Società Tipografica di Classici Italiani, Milano, 1825, p.V.
- E. Raimondi, "Alfieri 1782: <<un teatro terribile>>", Il teatro italiano nel Settecento, a c. di G. Guccini, il Mulino, Bologna, 1988.
- J.G. Robertson, Studies in the Genesis of Romantic Theory in the Eighteenth Century, Cambridge University Press, 1923.
- S. Romagnoli, "Teatro e recitazione nel Settecento", Orfeo in Arcadia - Studi sul teatro a Roma nel Settecento, a cura di G. Petrocchi, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Firenze, 1984, p.34.
- S. Sharp, Letters from Italy, London, 1767.
- L. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500-1800, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977.
- R. Turchi, ed. "La commedia del Settecento", Il Teatro italiano, Einaudi, Torino, 1987, p.XXI.
- R. Turchi, La commedia italiana del Settecento, Sansoni, Firenze, 1985 and 1986.
- A.E. Visconti, "Idee elementari sulla poesia romantica", Il Conciliatore, N.28, 6 dicembre, 1818.
- G. Weise, L'ideale eroico del Rinascimento - Diffusione europea e tramonto, Vol.II, Napoli 1965.
- R. Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, M. Haven, vol.I, 1965.
- R. Williams, Writing in Society, Verso Edition, London, 1984.
- A. Zeno, L'AMBLETO OPERA da rappresentarsi nel Reggio Teatro d'Haymarket. The HAMLET. An Apera. As it is performed at the QUEEN's THEATRE in the HAYMARKET; London, Printed for Jacob Tonson, at Shakespeare's Head over-against Catherine Street in the Strand. 1712.

HAMLET

English Editions

Hamlet, H. Jenkins ed., The Arden Shakespeare, Methuen, 1982.

Hamlet, C. Watts ed., Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare, 1988.

Translations/Adaptations

W. Shakespeare, Amleto. N. D'Agostino ed., Milano, Garzanti 1984.

(P.A. de la Place) Le Théâtre Anglois. Tome I, A Londres, MDCCXLVI.

Hamlet. Tragédie imitée de l'Anglois; par M. Ducis, représentée pour la première fois par les Comédiens François Ordinaires du Roi, le 30 septembre 1769 - A Paris - chez Gogué, Libraire, Quai des Augustins, près du Pont S. Michel - MDCCLXX.

Collection de Tragédies, Comédies et Dramas Choiesies des plus célèbres auteurs modernes - Tome Premier - Hamlet - Tragédie par Monsieur Ducis - Livourne 1774, Chez Thomas Masi et Compagnie..

Amleto, tragedia di M. Ducis (Ad imitazione della Inglese di Shakespear) - tradotta in verso sciolto - In Venezia MDCCLXXIV - con licenza de'superiori - si vende in Mercerie all'insegna del Cicerone.

Il teatro moderno applaudito, Tomo IV, Amleto - Tragedia del Signor Ducis tradotta dal N.U. Francesco Gritti, Venezia 1796.

(P.P.F. Letourneur) 'Shakespeare traduit de l'Anglois' dédié au Roi, Homo sum: Humani nihil a me alienum puto. Tér. Tome premier - MDCCLXXVI.

Italian Musical Hamlets

AMLETO Ballo Tragico Pantomimo - da rappresentarsi nel Teatro. Grande alla Scala - Il Carnevale 1792. Composto e diretto DAL SIG. FRANCESCO CLERICO.

(G. Foppa) AMLETO, Dramma per Musica - da rappresentarsi nel nobilissimo nuovo teatro - DI PADOVA - Nella Fiera del Santo - L'anno 1792 - In Padova - Per li Conzatti a S. Lorenzo.

JULIUS CAESAR

IL GIULIO CESARE - Tragedia Istorica di Guglielmo Shakespeare - Tradotta dall'Inglese in Lingua Toscana - DAL DOTTOR DOMENICO VALENTINI - Professore di Storia Ecclesiastica nell'Università di Siena - IN SIENA L'ANNO MDCCLVI - nella stamperia di Agostino Bindi - Con Licenza de'Superiori.

Shakespearian Criticism

P.S. Conklin, A History of Hamlet Criticism, 1601-1821, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957 (re-issue).

A.M. Crinò, "An Unknown "Verso Sciolto" Translation of Hamlet's Soliloquy "To be or not to be" in the Archivio Magalotti", Shakespeare Today: Directions and Methods of Research, edited by Keir Elam. La casa Usher, Firenze, 1984.

G. Greer, Shakespeare. Oxford University Press, 1986.

T. Hawkes, "Telmah", Shakespeare and the Question of Theory, ed. by P. Parker and C. Hartman, Methuen, London, 1986.

S. Johnson, Preface to Shakespeare, 1765. The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol. VII, ed. A. Sherbo, Yale University Press, 1968.

M. Rose, Shakespearian Design. Harvard University Press, 1972.

E. Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia. New York, 1969.

Manuscript Material

Hamlet - Principe di Danimarca - Tragedia di Shakespeare - Translation in three versions by A. Verri, Archivio Verri, Milan.

Translation of the "To Be or not To Be" monologue by G. Renier Michiel, Ms PD. 125. c. Civico Museo Correr Library, Venice.

Letter from Alessandro to Pietro Verri, dated "Roma, 16 Novembre 1766", Folder N.57. Archivio Verri, Milan.

Shakespeare in Italy and France

Primary Sources

A. Morrocchesi, Lezioni di declamazione e d'arte teatrale. Firenze, 1832.

L. Riccoboni, Réflexions Historiques & Critiques sur les différens Théâtres de l'Europe, avec des pensées sur la Declamation. Paris, 1738.

Secondary Sources

L. Bragaglia, Shakespeare in Italia. Trevi, Roma, 1973.

B. Brunelli, "Interpreti di Shakespeare", Shakespeare degli Italiani. Società Editrice Torinese, 1950, Torino.

A. Busi, Otello in Italia. (1777-1972), Adriatica Editrice, Bari, 1973.

L. Collison Morley, Shakespeare in Italy. Stratford-upon-Avon, 1916.

M. Corona, La fortuna di Shakespeare a Milano. (1800-1825) Adriatica, Bari, 1970.

M. Corsi, "Interpreti di Shakespeare in Italia", Scenario, N.12, 1943.

A.M. Crinó, Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento. Roma, 1950.

B. Croce, Ariosto Shakespeare e Corneille. Laterza, Bari, 1968.

- H. Gatti, Shakespeare nei teatri milanesi dell'Ottocento. Adriatica editrice, Bari, 1968.
- A. Graf, L'anglomania e l'influsso inglese in Italia nel secolo XVIII. Torino, Loescher, 1911.
- A. Lombardo, "Shakespeare e la critica italiana" Sipario N.218, 1964.
- M. Monaco, Shakespeare on the French Stage in the Eighteenth Century. Didier, Paris, 1974.
- S.A. Nulli, Shakespeare in Italia. Hoepli, Milano, 1918.
- G. Ortolani, "Goldoni e Shakespeare". Rivista Italiana del Dramma. 15.5.1940.
- L. Pignotti, La tomba di Shakespeare. 1779.
- M. Praz, Caleidoscopio shakespeariano. Bari, 1969.
- L. Rasi, Comici Italiani. Firenze, 1905.
- F. Rossi, La cultura inglese a Milano e in Lombardia, nel Seicento e nel Settecento. Adriatica, Bari 1970.
- J.G. Robertson, "The Knowledge of Shakespeare on the Continent at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century", The Modern Language Review, I, 1905-1906.
- M. Scherillo, "Ammiratori e imitatori dello Shakespeare prima del Manzoni", Nuova Antologia. 16 novembre 1892.
- G. Schiavello, La fama dello Shakespeare nel secolo 18° Camerino, 1904.
- M. Sestito, Julius Caesar in Italia. Adriatica editrice, Bari 1978.
- P.V. Tieghem, Le Prérromantisme: la découverte de Shakespeare sur le Continent. Paris 1947.

Translation Studies

- S. Bassnett, Translation Studies. Methuen, 1980, "Translating Spatial Poetry: An Examination of Theatre Texts in Performance", Literature and Translation. J.S. Holmes, J. Lambert, R. van den Broeck (eds.), Leuven, 1978; "The Translator in the Theatre", Theatre Quarterly N.40, London 1981; "Ways through the Labyrinth - Strategies and Methods of Translating Theatre Texts", The Manipulation of Literature. ed. T. Hermans, Croom Helm, 1985.
- M. Denes, A Study of Translation Theories in 18th Century Italy and their relevance to the Questione della Lingua. March 1983, Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, University of Warwick.
- Dramenübersetzung 1960-1985. Eine Bibliographie. Herausgegeben von Fritz. Paul und Brigitte Schultze, which is being issued periodically as a work-in-progress by a Nationally Funded Collaborative Research Center (Sonderforschungsbereich), Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen.

G. Petrone Fresco, "Proposta per un'applicazione della teoria della comunicazione di Jakobson al processo di traduzione del testo letterario", C. De. Stasio, I critici e la cultura. Opera Universitaria, Milano, 1982.

G. Petrone Fresco, "The hidden text: problems of translation in As You Like It, Palimpsestes. N.1, Service des publications - Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris III, 1987.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS

GIUSEPPE BARETTI

Primary Sources

G. Baretti, An Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy, with observations on the mistakes of some travellers with regard to that country, London 1769, Vol.I.

Discours sur Shakespeare et sur M. de Voltaire par Joseph Baretti Secrétaire pour la correspondance étrangère de l'Académie Royale Britannique. A Londres chez Nourse, Libraire du Roi, Et à Paris chez Durand Neveu, MDCCLXXXVII.

G. Baretti, Discours sur Shakespeare et M. de Voltaire, a c. di F. Biondillo, Carabba Editore, Lanciano, 1911.

G. Baretti, A Dissertation upon the Italian Poets, in which are intersperced some Remarks on Mr. Voltaire's Essay on the Epic Poets. London, printed for R. Dodsley, MDCCLIII.

G. Baretti, Epistolario. Bari, 1936.

G. Baretti, Lettere famigliari di Giuseppe Baretti ai suoi fratelli, dal 1760 al 1777, Torino.

G. Baretti, Opere. Rizzoli, Milano, 1967.

G. Baretti, La frusta letteraria, I-II, a cura di L. Piccioni, Laterza, Bari, 1932.

Secondary Sources

L. Collison Morley, Giuseppe Baretti and his Friends. John Murray, London, 1909.

A. Devalle, La critica letteraria nel '700: Giuseppe Baretti, i suoi rapporti con Voltaire, Johnson e Parini. Milano, 1932.

M. Fubini, Dal Muratori al Baretti. Bari, 1954.

C.J.M. Lubbers-van der Brugge, Johnson and Baretti: some aspects of eighteenth century literary life in England and Italy. J.B. Wolters, Groningen, 1951.

L. Morandi, Voltaire contro Shakespeare Baretti contro Voltaire. Città di Castello, 1884.

ANTONIO CONTI

Primary Sources

Il Cesare (Tragedia del Sig. Ab. Antonio Conti, nobile veneto con alcune cose concernenti l'opera medesima, G.A. Archi, in Faenza, 1726.

"Dissertazione sopra la Ragion Poetica del Gravina". Prose e Poesie del Signor Abate ANTONIO CONTI Patrizio Veneto, Tomo Secondo, e Postumo. Cui precedano le notizie spettanti alla sua vita, e suoi studi. IN VENEZIA presso Giambattista Pasquali, MDCCLVI - Con licenza de' Superiori, e Privilegio.

Antonio Conti, Versioni poetiche, a cura di G. Gronda, Laterza, Bari, 1966.

Secondary Sources

G. Brognoligo, "Le imitazioni shakespeariane di Antonio Conti", Rassegna padovana, I, 1891.

G. Brognoligo, "L'opera letteraria di Antonio Conti", Ateneo Veneto, XVII-XVIII, 1893-94, IV.

F. Colagrosso, La prima tragedia di Antonio Conti, 1893, Napoli.

G. Gronda, "Tradizione e innovazione: le versioni poetiche di Antonio Conti", Giornale storico della letteratura italiana, Torino 1970, pp.304-305.

G. Gronda, "Antonio Conti e l'Inghilterra", English Miscellany, 15, 1964.

V.M. Hamm, "Antonio Conti and English Aesthetics", Comparative Literature, Vol.8, 1956.

A. Salza, "L'abate Antonio Conti e le sue tragedie", Annali della Scuola normale di Pisa, XIII, 1899.

PAOLO ROLLI

Primary Sources

P. Rolli, "Letter to the readers". Satire e Rime di M. Lodovico Ariosto. Londra, per Giovanni Pickard, 1716.

Remarks upon M. Voltaire's Essay on the Epick Poetry of the European Nations, by Paul Rolli, London, printed and sold by Tho. Edlin (...) 1728.

Examen de l'Essai de M. de Voltaire sur la Poésie Epique, par M. Paul Rolli, Traduit de l'Anglois par M.L.A. à Paris chez Rollin fils (...) MDCCXXVIII.

Del Paradiso Perduto, poema inglese di Giovanni Milton - Libri sei - parte prima, tradotti da Paolo Rolli, compagno della Reale Società in Londra - L'Acclamato

nell'Accademia degli Intronati in Siena, Accademico Quirino e Pastore Arcade in Roma. Londra, presso Samuel Aris, MDCCXXXIX - Vita di Giovanni Milton.

P. Rolli, Il Paradiso Perduto, poema inglese del Signor Milton tradotto in nostra lingua al quale si premettono Osservazioni sopra il Libro del Signor Voltaire che esamina l'Epica Poesia delle Nazioni Europee, scritte originalmente in inglese, e in Londra stampate nel 1728, poi 1730.

P. Rolli, Delle Ode di Anacreonte Teio, London, 1739.

Secondary Sources

G. E. Dorris, Paolo Rolli and the Italian Circle in London, 1715-1744. Mouton, The Hague-Paris, 1967.

S. Fassini, "Paolo Rolli contro il Voltaire", Giornale Storico della letteratura italiana. Loescher, Torino, 1907.

ALESSANDRO AND PIETRO VERRI

Primary Sources

A. Verri, Notti Romane. a cura di R. Negri, Laterza, Bari, 1967.

A. Verri, Vicende Memorabili dal 1789 al 1801, precedute da una vita del Medes. di Gio. Antonio Maggi, Guglielmini, 1858.

Carteggio di P. e A. Verri. Vol. III, a cura di F. Novati e E. Greppi, Agosto 1769-Settembre 1770, Cogliati, Milano, 1911.

Vol. V, a cura di E. Greppi e di A. Giulini, Gennaio-Dicembre 1772, Cogliati, Milano, 1926.

Vol. IX, a cura di G. Seregni, Dal 1^o aprile 1777 al 30 giugno 1778, A. Milesi e figli, Milano 1937.

Vol. X a cura di G. Seregni, Dal 1^o luglio 1778 al 29 dicembre 1779, A. Giuffré, Milano, 1939.

Vol. XI, a cura di G. Seregni, Dal 1^o gennaio 1780 al 26 maggio 1781, Giuffré, Milano, 1940.

Vol. XII, Dal 30 maggio 1781 al 25 settembre 1782, a cura di G. Seregni, Giuffré, Milano, 1942.

A. Verri, Tentativi Drammatici. Livorno, 1779.

P. Verri, Manoscritto per Teresa. a cura di G. Barbarisi, Serra e Riva, Milano, 1983.

Secondary Sources

F. Altieri, Dictionary English and Italian containing all the words of the Vocabulary della Crusca and several hundred more taken from the most approved authors, London, 1726-1727.

G. Baretti, Dictionary of the English and Italian Language, London, 1760.

Shakespeare, Works, edited by Mr. Theobald, London, 1767, 8 vols.

M. Cerruti, Neoclassici e giacobini, Silva Editore, Milano, 1969.

Fabrizio Cicoira, Alessandro Verri, Patron, Bologna, 1982.

S. Colognesi, "Shakespeare e Alessandro Verri", ACME, Vol.16, Fasc. 2-3, Maggio 1963.

E. Greppi, "Un'opera inedita di A. Verri sulla Storia d'Italia", Archivio Storico Lombardo, XXXII (1905), s.IV, vol.III.

G. Trombatore, "I Romanzi di Alessandro Verri" Belfagor, anno XXIII, N.1, 31.1.1968.

VOLTAIRE

Primary Sources

The Complete Works of Voltaire, ed. T. Besterman, Vol.XXV (1762-1763) Banbury 1973, , Vol. XXXV (1769-1770), Banbury, 1974.

The Complete Works of Voltaire, ed. T. Besterman, Correspondence Vol. 86, II, 1730-1734, Vol.87, III, 1734-1736, Institut et Musée Voltaire, University of Toronto Press, 1969.

Voltaire, Correspondence I, 1704-1738 ed., T. Besterman Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard 1963.

Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire. "Théâtre", Tome 3, Garnier, 1877, Paris, "Dissertation sur la Tragédie ancienne et moderne" Troisième Partie.

Voltaire, Essay on the Epick Poetry of all the European Nations from Homer down to Milton, London, 1727.

Voltaire, Lettres choisies, Garnier, Paris, 1963.

Voltaire, Lettres philosophiques, ed. G. Lanson, Paris 1924, Tome II.

Voltaire, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. R. Moland, Tome 7 (1877); Tome 24 (1879); Tome 25 (1879); Tome 30 (1880) - Garnier, Paris (Reprint 1967).

Voltaire, Mélanges Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961.

Secondary Sources

T. Besterman, Voltaire. New York, 1969.

T. Besterman ed., "Voltaire on Shakespeare", Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century. Vol.LIV, Institut et Musée Voltaire, Genève, 1967.

E. Bouvy, Voltaire et l'Italie (Paris, 1898) Slatkine Reprints, Genève, 1970.

T.R. Lounsbury, Shakespeare and Voltaire. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1902.

R. Naves, Le Goût de Voltaire. Garnier, Paris, 1938.

"Parallèle entre Otway et Racine". Le Journal Encyclopédique. 1.11.1760.

"Parallèle entre Shakespeare et Corneille". Le Journal Encyclopédique. 15.10.1760.

A.M. Rousseau, ed., Voltaire, La Mort de César. Paris, 1964.

E. Sonet, Voltaire et l'influence anglaise. Slatkine Reprints, Genève 1970.

THE BRITISH LIBRARY

BRITISH THESIS SERVICE

TITLE SHAKESPEARE'S RECEPTION IN 18TH CENTURY
ITALY: THE CASE OF HAMLET

AUTHOR Gabriella
PETRONE FRESCO

DEGREE Ph.D

**AWARDING
BODY** Warwick University

DATE 1991

**THESIS
NUMBER** DX177597

THIS THESIS HAS BEEN MICROFILMED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction. Some pages may have indistinct print, especially if the original papers were poorly produced or if awarding body sent an inferior copy. If pages are missing, please contact the awarding body which granted the degree.

Previously copyrighted materials (journals articles, published texts etc.) are not filmed.

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and that no information derived from it may be published without the author's prior written consent.

Reproduction of this thesis, other than as permitted under the United Kingdom Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under specific agreement with the copyright holder, is prohibited.